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OR,

THE LONE HAND.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "COLORADO RUBE," "THE GOLD
DRAGON," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DEFIANCE.

THE report of a revolver rung out sharply on the air, and the half-dozen men who had been riding through Rattlesnake Gulch came to a halt. As one man they looked for him who had fired, but no one besides themselves was visible.

"Where is he?" asked one of their number.

"I am not sure it was he who fired," replied a finely-formed man who rode at the front.

"This is about the place, and that was the appointed signal."

"Other men about Leadville may fire a revolver. If Wild Dick Turpin is here, why don't he show himself?"

A mocking laugh floated out on the air.

"Why don't you look for him, Mighty Ruler of Leadville? Are your eyes blind that you cannot see?"

The echo, which had deceived them when the

WILD DICK TURPIN RODE TO THE DOOR OF THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND NAILED A BROAD SHEET OF PAPER TO THE DOOR WITH THE BUTT OF HIS REVOLVER.

revolver was fired, was again deceptive, but, looking to the top of the cliff, the leader of the party saw a man standing at the rock's verge. Another moment and he began a rapid descent, leaping from rock to rock with what seemed mad disregard of consequences.

A mis-step would hurl him to the very bottom, a lifeless mass of flesh; yet he came down like a mountain goat. His boldness and agility held the spectators mute until he reached the bottom of the gulch, and then he threw up one hand in mocking salute.

"I am here!" he airily said.

He was there, yet little could be seen of him. His form was fine, being muscular and graceful, and was clad in a novel way. Black tight breeches met beaded Indian moccasins at the bottom, and a cut-away velvet jacket at the top; while over the breast of the jacket floated the loose ends of a flaming red necktie. An ordinary miner's hat met a mask which covered his face beyond recognition, and only that his agility showed him to be young, he might have been of any age imaginable.

This man was no stranger by reputation in that part of Colorado. For some weeks all that section bordering Leadville had rung with the fame of an outlaw and road-agent who had given a name chosen by himself—Dick Turpin, of Leadville, or Wild Dick as some named him.

His whole career since his appearance had been in accordance with his *sobriquet*; the old English robber whose name he had appropriated was not more daring and reckless than he. At the head of a band of road-agents he carried dismay to the dwellers in the territory over which he rode.

Every attempt to capture them had proved futile; as well might the officers have hunted so many wills-o'-the-wisp. Mounted on fleet horses, they easily outstripped all pursuers, or, when looked for in one place, appeared at another, many miles away.

The whole region rung with the name of Wild Dick. His reckless bravery, dashing ways, politeness, and when he robbed ladies, his gallantry, were remarkable. Such a road-robber had never before existed around Leadville, and as, curiously enough, he had never been known to shed human blood, there were many who secretly admired him.

Sheriff Robert Bradstreet was not one of this number, and he had done all that man could do to hunt down the outlaw, but with no good result. Finally there had come to him a letter, signed "Dick Turpin, of Leadville," which informed him that if he would come to a designated point in Rattlesnake Gulch, at a specified time, he could meet and talk with the outlaw.

The letter cautioned him against attempting violence or treachery, as it was to be a "peace meeting," and declared that though the writer would have an equal number of men at hand, he would scrupulously refrain from any unlawful act.

It was a challenge which Sheriff Bradstreet would not refuse, so there he was, and there was the man he had come to meet.

"Welcome, sheriff!" the road-agent added. "It is not often we meet, but old friends do not forget each other."

"I suppose you are the real Dick Turpin, of Leadville, so called," suggested the sheriff.

"I am."

"Won't you remove your mask?"

"Thank you, I couldn't think of it," and the outlaw laughed lightly.

"So noted a man ought not to be ashamed of his face."

"We will waive that point and come to business. What do you want of me, Sheriff Bradstreet?"

"It was you who appointed the meeting. You said that you were ready to treat with me, from which I inferred that you wished, possibly, to surrender."

"Did you, really?" laughed Wild Dick. "Well, I will surrender—on one condition."

"What is that?"

"Absolute pardon from the Governor of the State, and an unrestricted title to Leadville and all that it contains."

"What mummery is this? Do you really expect anything of the kind?"

"Certainly not; I merely state my position, and let you do as you see fit. As for why I called you here, I know that hope deferred makes a man bilious, and as you've so long been hunting for me, I thought that politeness required me to grant an interview."

Bradstreet frowned, and barely controlled the impulse to draw a revolver.

"Well, sir," he answered, "since you have nothing to say, I hereby order you, in the name of law, to surrender."

"When?"

"Now!"

"My dear bailiff, I can't think of it; this is not a business session, but a friendly conference. At any other time you can have me by the taking."

"You have run an unusual career around this place," continued Bradstreet, his fingers playing nervously on the rein, "but the day of your kind around here is past—or ought to be. Leadville has advanced too far to be bullied by

road-agents. You have had rare luck in escaping capture, but it will come sooner or later, if you persist in your course. The best thing you can do is to get out of Colorado as fast as you can go."

"Oh! but I thought you were going to capture me."

The light, mocking laugh which followed this retort stung Bradstreet to the quick.

"By my life!" he exclaimed, "I don't know why I don't. True, I promised you freedom from molestation, but I'm not sure that an officer should keep the lightest promise with one of your kind. I don't know what is to prevent my capturing you now."

The sheriff's hand rested on the pocket where he carried his revolver, and the light of a feverish desire to secure this noted outlaw was in his eyes. But Wild Dick laughed again.

"Unlike you, I know what is to prevent. It is my humble self. Do not finger your revolver, my dear friend, for, before you could draw it, I should shoot you dead. Perhaps you've heard what I can do with sixes. Perhaps you know that I am sometimes called the 'Lion of Leadville.'"

The laugh was gone, and the outlaw's voice rung out with steel-like inflection as he drew himself erect, his eyes glittering at the sheriff through the holes in his mask.

Bradstreet sat sullenly on his horse, silent and motionless. He had heard of Wild Dick Turpin's shooting. Nobody could say that they had ever seen the man kill, or even severely wound, a human being, but many a robbed traveler had a tale to tell of Turpin's wonderful feats with revolver and rifle.

"Well," the official finally said, "I can't see that this meeting amounts to anything, whatever."

"Mr. Bradstreet, will you kindly step aside with me? I have a word for your private ear."

One moment the sheriff hesitated; then he made a quick gesture and rode away from his men. Turpin kept beside him, and they paused when beyond hearing of the others, Bradstreet being wary and alert, and the Lion of Leadville wholly at ease. So far as casual glance could reveal he was alone, but the officers felt sure that the vines which fringed the cliffs held men enough to back their leader.

"Sheriff," abruptly continued the masked man, "I believe you have on your force a person called Jude Peterson—he who is sometimes called the 'Police Spy.'"

"We have such a man."

"Do you trust him?"

"Implicitly."

"The more fool you, then. Did it never occur to you that this Jude may be like the first Judas on record? The name is suggestive of treachery."

"Peterson's name is Judah."

"Indeed! Even that is questionable, but we will let it go. Let me speak of his character. However much you may trust the fellow, I know him to be not only a rascal in a general sense, but false to you. Sir, your trusted spy is the biggest rascal in Colorado, in that he uses his official position to work his base ends. I make bold to say that I am not the only law-breaker around here whom you can't catch. Why is it that the minor rogues of Leadville elude you so successfully? I'll tell you why. Jude Peterson is their bosom friend, and he gives them the 'tip' which keeps them out of your reach."

The sheriff had vainly tried to interrupt, and he now broke forth explosively:

"Are you a fool, as well as a villain? The gentleman whom you malign is my personal friend, and as honest a man as ever lived. You might as well defame the mayor. Of course you have a grudge against Peterson."

"I have," frankly admitted the outlaw. "If I had none, do you suppose I would betray him? Hardly! But I have told the truth. Jude Peterson is a traitor to you."

"Rubbish!"

"You refuse to believe me?"

"I do."

"Then go your own gait, my gentleman. Yet, stay, stay; you are an honest man, Robert Bradstreet, and I would not willingly see you ruined. Jude Peterson is dangerous to you in more than one way. Probably you don't suspect his real name."

"One thing I can clearly see: you want to poison my mind against him. It won't work, however; I do not forget that it comes from Dick Turpin."

The sheriff spoke warmly, even intemperately; and the Lion of Leadville made a quick gesture.

"The Bradstreet blood was ever hot."

"Indeed! Perhaps you are going to charge me with some misdemeanor?"

Bradstreet was an honorable man, but he was still young, and had not learned to govern his passions with the skill of maturer years. He trusted Jude Peterson, and believed that Wild Dick spoke against him only to remove from the police force a man whom he feared.

"We won't go into details," was the outlaw's quiet reply; "but it may be I could tell people about here what they have never suspected be-

fore. I believe they do not know that you are from old Kentucky?"

Simple as the words were they were enough to make Sheriff Bradstreet start back as though he had received a blow. His expression changed, and became one of dismay.

"Jude Peterson knows it, though," Wild Dick coolly added, "and that's why he's in Leadville; that's why he has attached himself to you. Beware of him!"

"Man or devil!" exclaimed Bradstreet, "what do you mean? Off with that mask, that I may see your face!"

"Thank you, but I again decline. Better devote your time to unmasking Jude Peterson."

"Always that name!" angrily cried the sheriff.

"Can you speak on no other subject? What is Jude, that you eternally harp on his name?"

"So you would have it! Well, be it so. Jude Peterson is but an alias for one of the Gregersons of Black Run?"

CHAPTER II.

WILD DICK'S BOAST.

BRADSTREET recoiled again, and this time his expression was one of more dismay than before. He glanced nervously about the gulch as though he expected to see a foe spring from cover and confront him, and then his gaze wandered back to the Lion of Leadville.

Eyes and face were flaming with excitement, and he hoarsely exclaimed:

"I have called you 'man or devil,' but man you are not, Devil, then, I will see your face, though the sight costs my life or yours!"

He started forward with hand outstretched to tear away the mask, but in a flash a revolver gleamed in Wild Dick Turpin's hand and the muzzle was turned full on Bradstreet. One touch on the trigger would have left Leadville minus a sheriff, but that official was not utterly mad. Once more he paused.

"Be sensible," suggested the outlaw, coolly.

"Why does all your anger flame against me? What matters it who has warned you, as long as you now know the truth concerning Jude Peterson? Bah! that name is a mockery. Give the man his true name—call him Gregerson. Possibly your heart don't beat so tenderly toward your dear friend now."

"I will not believe you. You are the man I have to fear."

"The Bradstreet blood was ever hot."

"Again that old saying. Dick Turpin, who are you?"

"You have named my name."

"Are you a Gregerson?"

"No."

"I believe that you lie!"

The outlaw made a sweeping gesture.

"Enough!" he said, coldly and haughtily.

"We need talk no more, Sheriff Bradstreet. I called you here to listen to a solemn warning, and now may your folly be on your own head. I have no more to say, and, with your permission, we will end the interview. I suppose it will be hard for you to see me go, but don't get too eager; I have men concealed in the vines which cover the cliffs; even now more than one eye is glancing along rifle-barrel. At one movement of treachery on your part, they fire."

Bradstreet's thoughts left personal affairs. He only remembered then who his companion was.

"It is a bitter pill to let you go, Dick Turpin," he said, "but my word of honor is pledged and I will not break it. You shall go without molestation, but you have not seen the last of me. I have resolved to purify this region, and I will yet have you in irons!"

The outlaw had turned partly away, but he now faced about suddenly.

"Do you mean it?"

"I swear it!"

"Sheriff," was the quiet remark, "you will never see that day, but, one month from now, I will enter Leadville and deliver myself as your prisoner, unless before then I shall have been in the heart of your place of power and given you irrefragable evidence that I can laugh at you, go and come amid your traps and trappers, and hoodwink those whom you think second in wit only to yourself."

"This is empty talk."

"Do you carry a knife?"

"Yes."

"Will you exchange with me?"

"With what purpose?"

"I will place your knife on top of your own desk, in your own office."

Bradstreet quickly drew a long-bladed knife.

"I want none of your property, sir, but here is what you mention. Place that where you say, and I will admit that you are sharper than any other man I have met; but I'll wager my life that I place irons on you before you do what you say."

"Wager nothing. It isn't safe, and is a bad habit. Sheriff, don't forget what I've said, for there is no chaff in the wheat. Farewell!"

Like an arrow the bold outlaw sprang to the side of the steep cliff, and then, with wonderful strength and agility, went leaping from rock to rock, rapidly nearing the top. Bradstreet looked at him in amazement. So might

the chamois-hunters of whom he had read ascend the steep ways of their rocky scene of operations. Dick Turpin soon reached the top. He paused for a moment on the verge of the cliff, waved his hand, uttered a clear shout, and then was gone from view.

Bradstreet looked after him in silence. He had seen many of the most noted of Western men, but never one who impressed him as Wild Dick had done. Well had the wild outlaw chosen his *sobriquet*; he was as dashing and irresistible as his English prototype. Even at that, the sheriff instinctively muttered:

"Is he man or devil?"

Slowly Bradstreet turned back toward his men. There was a half-guilty feeling in his mind as he remembered that he had been within a yard of the Lion of Leadville, and then let him go; but, even if he had been inclined to disregard his promise that he would not molest the man, he felt sure that Dick's statement that the cliffs concealed men of his band was no idle boast.

Taking his place at the head of his men once more, the sheriff led them back. They had many questions to ask, but little information did they get. The leader had relapsed into a thoughtful mood unusual to him, and their questions were curtly answered.

Now that he had a chance to think quietly, the force of what Wild Dick had said influenced him greatly.

Not yet was he ready to think ill of Jude Peterson, the police spy, in any way; but, since the day when he crossed the Mississippi river, Bradstreet had never told any man about his past life, and now the outlaw had shown that he knew more than the sheriff's trusted friends.

There was that in the past which Bradstreet had hoped would never again be referred to in his presence. As had been intimated, he was from Kentucky, and when he left there he had fled rapidly, traveling day and night.

After all this lapse of time, he was beginning to breathe freely; to believe that the shadows of the past would never again fall athwart his path; but the hope had been proven groundless by the outlaw's words. More than ever Bradstreet wondered who Dick Turpin was, and, so completely did he devote himself to consideration of the subject, the pace of the party was but slow as they returned to Leadville.

Arrived there the sheriff went at once to his office. He was not in good humor, and viciously pulling off his gloves, he advanced to throw them on the desk.

As he did so his expression changed and he recoiled in blank amazement.

On the desk lay a large sheet of writing-paper, and, thrust through it so as to pin it to the desk, was a long-bladed knife. More than that, it was the very knife which Bradstreet had himself given the Lion of Leadville less than two hours before!

For a moment he looked in silent amazement, and then he detected several words on the paper, written in a bold, dashing hand:

"Here is your knife, Sheriff Bradstreet. I never fail to keep a vow.
DICK TURPIN,
of Leadville."

A bitter exclamation fell from the sheriff's lips. Even before he had given thought to the matter the bold outlaw had made good his boast. It showed wonderful nerve and celerity on his part, for, after leaving Rattlesnake Gulch, he must have mounted a good horse and rode at full speed toward the city.

Bradstreet withdrew the knife, which was driven deep into the wood, and then violently jerked a bell-cord. This was to summon a man who had general charge of the office, and was supposed to see that no one entered the place unlawfully.

The man soon came.

"Bailey, who has been here?"

"Nobody, since you went away, sheriff."

"Wrong! somebody has been here."

"I'm sure nobody has," was the dogged reply.

"I've been sitting by the window all the time, and nobody could pass unseen by me. You saw me there, and bowed to me, when you came in half an hour ago—"

"What?"

Bailey repeated his remark.

"Half an hour ago!" echoed Bradstreet.

"Why, I've not been here before since noon—five hours ago."

"You must be joking now," said Bailey, with a faint smile.

"I am not. Just after dinner I went into the mountains, and have only just returned. I struck the town ten minutes ago."

"Then I must be bewitched," muttered the man, "for I saw some one whom I could almost swear was you. He entered the office, stayed perhaps, a minute, and then came out and went away. As he passed the window he looked up and nodded to me, so that I saw his face plainly I can swear—that is, I could almost swear that it was you."

Bailey was plainly inclined to doubt the chief, but the latter regarded his obstinacy as a cloak for his stupidity in allowing a man to pass, who, beyond doubt, was the Lion of Leadville. Wasting no more time, he hastened away and only

paused when, in the street he suddenly met a peculiar-looking man who was gliding along with cat-like steps.

He was middle-aged, with an extremely slender, lithe figure; a swarthy face, which was smoothly shaven; and black hair which, in its tendency to crinkle, would have suggested to a suspicious mind that the owner had a dash of negro blood in his veins. He would have been a marked figure anywhere, but was made so by the black suit he wore, with a vest cut high in the neck like that of a priest.

This was Jude Peterson, the police spy, or, as he was often called, "The Raven."

Bradstreet stopped him at once.

"Jude, Wild Dick Turpin has been here."

"Where?"

"In my office."

"But I thought you had gone into the hills to meet him?"

"I did go, and saw him; but he has returned the visit much sooner than I expected."

The sheriff then gave a brief account of what had happened. Jude listened phlegmatically, his face as blank as the wall except when his lips parted a little, now and then, in the shadow of a smile, which might mean anything or nothing. The Raven's smile was unreadable.

"Now, then," said Bradstreet, in conclusion, "what are we going to do about this? Of course there is no mystery about how Turpin got here—a fleet horse enabled him to outride us, and it needed no very accurate disguise to fool Bailey. But are we going to let this scoundrel play with us thus?"

"What can we do more than we have done? He has the cunning of a fox, and seems to divine all our traps as though by magic. We can only keep on trying, and hope to nab him in the end."

"Peterson, there are men here who claim to be trail-followers of skill. Say to them that if they will find Wild Dick's cave, I'll give them five hundred dollars."

"That's a big reward."

"It can be raised by private subscription in ten minutes."

"No doubt that is so, and I'll hunt up the best men I know. As you say, this Turpin has run an unparalleled career, and it's time to bring him up all-standing. I'll do the best I can."

After some further conversation they separated, and each went his way. Bradstreet had not seen fit to mention the accusations made by the outlaw against Peterson, and the latter was in total ignorance of the fact that Dick Turpin claimed to know anything about his past life.

When he left Bradstreet, the spy glided on in his cat-like way until he reached a certain house, at the door of which he rung.

He was admitted by a tall, imperious-looking woman, who greeted him with this abrupt question:

"Well, what news of Robert Bradstreet?"

CHAPTER III.

RED KIT, THE WASP.

THERE was a clatter of hoofs, and a single rider went dashing through a canyon, mounted on a black horse which was the perfection of equine grace, strength and speed.

The rider was Wild Dick Turpin.

He had been to Leadville and fulfilled his boast, and was on his way to the cave where he and his band found shelter. The leaving of the knife in the sheriff's desk had been an act of bravado, prompted by pique. Bradstreet had so scorned all he said that he had seen fit to give him a lesson, and he now felt considerable satisfaction, being well aware that the event would stir the sheriff's hot blood to the quick.

As he rode through the mountain canyons he had his mask once more in place, and would easily have been recognized if any one had been there to see him, but there was no such person about.

He finally entered an extremely wild part of the country, and, after winding about in a way which would have discouraged one who might have followed him, reached the head-quarters of the band; the cave for which the sheriff and his men had often searched in vain.

It was a spacious place inside, but reached by ways which gave no encouragement to a seeker of its secrets.

Entering, Turpin found the whole band at home, and had a short conversation with Duke Hallock, his lieutenant, a stout man of middle age, whose grave nature seemed more befitting an honest man than an outlaw. Then he passed to the rear of the cave, where he had his private quarters. This part of the secret abode was cared for by Hallock's wife and daughter, who shared Duke's fortune, good or bad, with unwavering devotion.

Dick Turpin went to his own "room," as his private den was with some degree of appropriateness called. Nature and art had formed around it four walls, and the outlaw's luxurious taste had furnished it well. The floor was carpeted and the walls hung with curtains, and the furniture, though made by a carpenter who happened to be in the band, had been richly upholstered.

He threw off his hat and mask, and then, if

the honest people of Leadville could have seen him, no one would have wondered how it had deceived Bailey, the attendant at Bradstreet's office.

There was a resemblance between him and the sheriff which was remarkable. Both had the same form, the same shape of head, and the same forehead, eyes and square, resolute jaws.

Dressed alike, and placed side by side, it might have puzzled even Jude Peterson to say which was his leader. Resemblances are common, but one so marked as this is rarely seen.

Well might the sheriff have dreaded new complications had he known the truth.

Dick Turpin at once cast off his gaudy road-uniform, and then dressed himself in a sober, citizen's suit. Thus garbed, he might have passed anywhere as an honest, plain business man.

Next, he rung a bell which brought his lieutenant's wife to the door. She was one who had an unwritten history expressed in her face. She was a comely woman, with rippling brown hair and plump features. Ever since Wild Dick knew her she had been an extremely quiet person, but he was enough of a student of character to suspect that she had once been as wild as the hawk; that a heart of fire beat under her grave exterior.

He directed that his supper be brought at once, and, when it came, ate heartily.

He had just finished when a step sounded at the door. Looking up, he saw his lieutenant's daughter.

Red Kit, the Wasp, she was called by the band, but it was a term of affection. Her abundant, rippling hair of a brick-red color, furnished the first part of her pet name, and her bright, saucy tongue was responsible for the last part—"the Wasp."

It was not given as implying that she was a vixen, however, but to express the admiration of the rough, yet not wholly depraved, road-agents.

In many ways she was a reproduction of her mother's distinctive qualities, except that time had not thrown an element of gravity around her natural qualities. Bright, daring, restless, quick-witted and saucy of speech, she seemed to be a fit companion for those who led so wild a life, yet her character was as spotless as any woman's.

In point of years she was still less than twenty, and her small stature had led all to regard her a child. She was one of those who retain an appearance of extreme youth long after a woman's heart reigns supreme.

It was the first time Wild Dick had seen her near his room, and there was surprise on his face, but he motioned to the remains of his supper.

"I am through, Kit."

"I haven't come for that," the girl quickly answered, but it was not as a retort; an unusual gravity showed in her voice. "You are going out, captain?"

"Yes."

"You go a good deal, of late."

"Do I?"

He looked at her sharply, for there seemed to be more in her manner than her words implied.

"Yes, and always in this suit of clothes. What double life are you leading?"

Abrupt and almost sharp was the question, and Dick looked at her in renewed surprise. She was very different then from her old self.

"Why do you think I am leading a double life?"

Red Kit made a quick, impatient gesture.

"I am not blind. My eyes were given me to use, and I have not failed to use them. I've read more than you thought, I reckon. Captain, are you going to bring any one here?"

"Bring any one here? Are you crazy, Kit?"

"No, but I sometimes wish I was."

Was this Red Kit, the Wasp? Dick looked at her still, and in increasing wonder. A day before she had been a bright, saucy child, who seemed to have no serious thought. Now, she seemed to have grown suddenly old; to be more like her mother than herself; and not only was her face grave, but he almost believed that he saw her lips tremble.

"Kit," he said, gravely, "what has gone wrong with you? You are in trouble. What is it?"

Her gaze, usually so bold and frank, was now downcast.

"Do you really want to know?" she slowly asked.

"Certainly I do; I may be able to help you."

He spoke earnestly, and meant all that he said, for he had always liked bright, joyous Kit, but, somehow, it seemed to him that he was addressing another person, like, and yet unlike, saucy Kit. It was no longer the careless child he looked upon, but a woman.

"If you want to help me, answer truly. Who are you going to bring here?"

"Nobody."

The downcast eyes were swiftly raised, and on Kit's face was an actual look of alarm. Her voice, too, faltered as she asked:

"Are you going to leave the band?"

A fleeting shadow of annoyance crossed Dick's face.

"Kit, don't talk in riddles any more. If this

is not one of your tricks, explain yourself in as few words as possible. I haven't the ghost of an idea what you are talking about."

"Dick, you can't deceive me!" she exclaimed. "I am not blind. Do you imagine that I don't understand where you go when you put on that suit? Once beyond the cave you cease to be the Lion of Leadville, and play a very different part. Just where you go I don't know, but I can almost swear it is to visit some woman. Why should you go there unless to—make love to her?"

The last words were uttered sharply, after a little pause, and the deeper shadow of annoyance on Dick's face indicated that, however correct the suspicion, he was not pleased by the suspicion expression.

Still, he managed to laugh.

"Nonsense! You are wholly wild, Kit. What has put such an absurd idea into your mind?"

"I am not blind."

"None of the men have spoken of it, and they would surely do so if they suspected as much as you do."

"Unlike me, they are blind."

Dick looked at her with a new interest. This was not Red Kit, the Wasp. No keen retort, no bright remark served to connect her with the old days. A woman stood before him, and in the quick breathing, the troubled face and averted eyes, he read something—he knew not what—which was so radical a change, that he felt sure he should never again be able to regard her as he had done before.

"Have you spoken to your father, Kit?"

"I've not spoken to any one."

"Well, why do you come to me, anyway?"

There was a tinge of reproof in his voice, and he felt like asking if he was not capable of managing his own affairs, but could not utter the words.

What was his surprise when the girl suddenly and fiercely exclaimed:

"Because, I would rather die than see you marry that woman!"

Dick Turpin recoiled. The vehement outburst was startling, and he would have been blind had not a vague suspicion of the truth occurred to him.

"It's no use for you to deny it, for I can see as plain as day," she continued. "Somewhere, not a great many miles from here, is a woman whom you go to see. Probably she don't know that you are Dick Turpin, but you are thinking of making her your wife. Then you would either bring her here or desert the band. I wouldn't have spoken—now—but I didn't know how soon you might go. Oh! Dick, Dick! kill me if you will, but don't love that woman!"

With this passionate outburst the girl fell on her knees, seized his hand and pressed it to her lips. The most gifted of emotional actresses could not have given a more vivid picture of woman's consuming grief, but, in Red Kit's case, it sprung from her very heart.

The Lion of Leadville stood dazed and uncertain. Blind, indeed, would he have been had he failed to understand then. She whom he had regarded as a buoyant, careless child had revealed in one breath that she was a woman at last, and moved by the deepest of woman's emotions.

Dick was dismayed. Outlaw he might be, but he was far superior to the petty knaves of society who revel in the sorrow of those who are so unfortunate as to love them; and Turpin felt only deep pity for the bright, kind-hearted girl whom he had always liked as a friend.

Gravely he lifted her to her feet, and then placed a chair for her. Then he sat down beside her. Her hands covered her face, and he could see but little of her bent head save the brick-red hair, with its beautiful ripples.

"Kit," he said, gently, "I am very sorry that you are in trouble."

"I couldn't help telling you," she said, with a sob. "Mother has told me how they do in the outside world; how all women hide their feelings and drift with the tide; but I can't do like them—it would kill me. I must speak plainly. Dick, you know what I mean, and it now rests with you. She don't love you as I do!"

"Kit, Kit, why will you persist in your suspicion? Have I not said that you are wrong?"

"I don't blame you, but I know I am right. There is another woman, and you go to see her, but if you insist on loving her, I'll kill myself. Dick, ain't you happy now? Are there better companions anywhere than the boys? Don't we do all we can to make you comfortable here? Oh! Dick, why can't you be happy with me?—with me?"

Once more she dropped on her knees at his feet, and the outlaw was almost at his wits' end. Red Kit's love was not like the flame of a candle which dies away in a night. It was strong, enduring, all-absorbing and passionate, and he felt that no common means could control it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GATHERING STORM.

WILD DICK had more than one reason for feeling troubled by Red Kit's unexpected avowal. Now that he had time to think more clearly he perceived that it might cause trouble to more than herself, and he realized the importance of arguing away her fancy.

So he began, with all the eloquence, logic and skill at his command. It seemed but a day before that he had consoled her for the loss of a fawn, which she had in the cave. Her tears then he had regarded as those of a child. Now, how all was changed!

He was trying to convince her that it would be to her advantage not to love him.

Why follow his elaborate argument? Why dwell on his wise logic? Advice is easy to give, but how different the position of the one who receives it; while the experience of time has shown the world that one might as well try to control the waters of the ocean as the flood-tide of love.

Red Kit did not hear in silence. Child of Nature that she was, she would not shrink back into a passive creature of clay, like her sisters of civilization, when her heart's happiness was at stake.

Rebelling she met Dick's argument, and when a clock at one side struck seven, he saw that he must go without having convinced her. Already he ought to be miles away, but this strange interview had made the lapse of time the last thing in his mind.

"I must go, Kit," he said, kindly, "but I will see you again. Think seriously upon what I have said, and remember who I am: a hunted outlaw. I fear I could never make you happy."

"You don't seem to be afraid that you can't make her happy!" retorted the girl, something in her old mood.

"You will insist that there is a mysterious woman. This is absurd, for I would not ask any one to become the wife of an outlaw—"

"So you're going to quit the business?"

Quick as a flash came the interruption, and Turpin saw that no ordinary evasion would answer with Red Kit. The situation was growing serious, and, seeing no other way to do, he declared emphatically that her suspicions were groundless. That she believed him he did not think, but there was no help for it; he could delay no longer to continue a useless argument.

He went out to order one of his men to get his horse ready, and, no sooner was Kit alone than she ran along another passage, caught up a hat and shawl as she went, and then made her way to where the horses were kept.

This was in a large, natural arena; so large that, as Dick Turpin's man prepared the black steed for the road, he did not see that Red Kit was at the same time saddling her own horse.

Dick soon led out the black, mounted, and went galloping down a canyon. He was long behind the time at which he had intended to start, and must make it up by rapid riding.

As he clattered away he did not suspect that another horse was speeding in the rear; he did not imagine that the cave-girl had determined to solve the doubt which was in her mind, and was in a promising position to do it.

Her theory in regard to Dick Turpin was correct.

There was a woman in the case; he intended to marry her; and it was his intention to promptly desert the band and leave no sign behind him.

His history was a strange one, and only misfortunes and bitter wrongs had driven him to the life of a road-agent. Naturally honest, kind and upright, he had found the world and all its people "dead against him." When he tried to be honest he was accused of crime; if he trusted a fellow-man, the confidence was betrayed.

If it is true that some men are born under an unlucky star, such must have been his lot. Misfortune dogged his steps wherever he went; he was imprisoned for crimes never committed, and his life was made a burden.

How he became associated with the outlaws will be told later. It was the result of chance, but when he drifted on the tide, his dashing bravery soon made him famous. He succeeded one Burke Broutt as leader. Broutt had been a cruel, yet cowardly, ruffian. Dick Turpin, when promoted, took as his motto: "Plunder, not butchery!" and made his men live up to it.

Since he had been at the head he had become noted, but the Leadville trails were safer than ever before, so far as human life was concerned.

There was a brighter spot in the Leadville Lion's life. Fifteen miles from the city lived a well-to-do mine superintendent, whose name was Raoul Legrand. One day the road-agent chief, traveling in his proper person, chanced upon the miner's house.

That day gave him a glimpse of a new life. Legrand had a daughter, Lois, and from the first Dick Turpin loved her. He determined to win her for his wife, but the way was one of difficulty. He saw that she was thoroughly honorable, and would never look kindly upon a road-agent.

His course was soon decided upon. Securing a sheep-ranch forty miles away, he selected a man whom he found begging for bread in Denver, and gave him one-half of all on condition that he represented to all that he and "Barnes," as Dick called himself at Legrand's, were equal partners, and that the latter was a good deal of the time away on business for the outfit.

This man proved faithful.

At regular intervals Dick went to Legrand's,

talked about his sheep-ranch, and quietly conducted his wooing. He was successful; Lois promised to become his wife; and it was arranged that, immediately after the wedding, which was near at hand, the entire family should go to Dakota and settle on a cattle-ranch.

Turpin dared not locate nearer Leadville.

All his hopes of the future were bound up in this plan. His position as an outlaw had become unbearable since he had won Lois's heart, and, though he had found the only good luck of his life since entering upon his career on the road, he was anxious to lead a life such as to deserve Lois's love and respect, hoping that the old ill-luck would never return.

Only a few days more, and he would be able to call Lois his own. Then it remained only to slip quietly away, and Dick Turpin would be buried so deeply that he hoped no one would ever mention him again.

With what anticipation he looked forward to the new life no pen can tell. His wasted, wretched, unfortunate past lay behind him like a black, miasmatic swamp, alike offensive and dangerous to behold. The future held—what? Perhaps a home, with Lois as its good spirit, and the road-agent's heart daily sent up the prayer which he dared not bring to his lips till Dick Turpin was a thing of the past.

He was now going to see Lois, and his black horse was for once too slow to keep pace with his eagerness to be there; the delay at the cave had been annoying.

It was annoying in more than one sense, and Turpin deeply regretted Red Kit's unfortunate passion.

She had been the life of the cave, and he had liked her as he would a child of half her years. Until recently he had not supposed her more than sixteen, and it was a new revelation to think of her as a woman.

"Poor Kit!" he muttered, "I wish she had never seen me. She is a fine little girl, and would make some man a good wife, but Providence grant that she may speedily forget me!"

Little did the road-agent suspect that Red Kit was even then on his track, intent on learning just who, and what, the woman was who had won the place she would gladly have filled in his heart.

As usual Dick took precautions to prevent officers of law from dogging him secretly, but the "Wasp" showed a cunning which baffled his precautions.

Screened by the darkness, she followed unseen.

Once at Legrand's the outlaw stabled his horse, entered the house and became plain Richard Barnes, dealer in sheep from South-down Ranch. There he was sure of a warm reception from Lois, her father and her mother. They little suspected his real character, and he looked forward eagerly to the now fast approaching day when this muttering volcano would be left behind.

Red Kit secreted her own horse in the bushes, and then, when a little reconnoitering had satisfied her that she need not fear detection, she advanced close to the house to investigate further.

A lowered curtain interfered with her plan, but, finding the window unfastened, raised the lower sash a trifle and was able to gratify both her eyes and ears.

Dick and Lois were in the room together.

The outlaw's daughter looked and saw her rival.

Lois Legrand was beautiful in the full sense of the word, with a fine form; well-shaped features; large, earnest, hazel eyes, which were like a well from which sprung honesty, sincerity and intelligence; and a grace of word and motion which might well charm any man.

Red Kit saw this at a glance. She did not underrate her rival, and her face was full of dismay. Until that moment she had not abandoned all hopes of convincing Dick that she would make him happier than "that other woman," but she realized at last what she had to work against.

Her rival could meet charm with charm, and the mountain girl also saw that Lois was one who had had the advantages of the more civilized world; and she had an idea that these advantages gave a woman the same power that a snake possesses which charms a helpless bird.

The spy listened.

What she heard was like the death-sentence to a helpless prisoner in court.

The words of the young couple were plainly audible, and she heard them express their mutual love and speak of the approaching wedding.

Her worst fears were realized!

Finally, she could bear it no longer, and, rushing back to her horse, she sprang upon its back and dashed away toward the cave at full speed. Once she looked back at the house, and then burst into bitter tears.

"Lost! lost! That female rattlesnake has coiled herself about his heart, and it's no wonder he gives no thought to red-headed Kit, the Wasp. Yes, she's pretty, but I hate her—hate her! She has robbed me—Has she? No! it shall not be. Before she shall have Dick, I'll shoot her to the heart!"

CHAPTER V.
RED KIT'S REVENGE.

A WEEK passed.

During this time Sheriff Bradstreet searched indefatigably for the Lion of Leadville, but always to no purpose. He had Jude Peterson and others out to search for the outlaws' cave; decoy vehicles were sent over the road; several innocent parties were arrested on suspicion, and in every way the official tried to relieve the region of what he was pleased to term its curse.

Robert Bradstreet was young and ambitious. When still younger he would have laughed at the idea of becoming a western sheriff, but, after a career of adventure and trouble, there he was, and it then became his ambition to excel as such.

He did not, however, seem likely to attain prominence by capturing Wild Dick Turpin.

Twice, while Bradstreet was watching for him, the noted outlaw dashed down near Leadville and added as many bold, dashing robberies to his list. Clearly, he defied the hunters, and never had he been more like his English prototype; he came and went as free as the wind, and almost with the same dash and speed.

Finally, there came an act which stirred Leadville to its center.

At the hour of noon, and in the full glare of the sun, through the open streets with people crowded, Wild Dick rode to the door of the sheriff's office and, while that gentleman smoked and meditated how to get his eyes once more upon the Lion of Leadville, that man nailed a broad sheet of paper to the door with the butt of his revolver. The sheriff heard the sound but supposed it next door, and only one person at first took notice of what was going on.

With careless curiosity he read the notice:

"PEOPLE OF LEADVILLE!

"If you want me, why don't you come and take me? You surely don't expect me to hunt up your jail, borrow the key and lock myself in, do you? With such great heads at the front you ought to soon run down a few despised road-agents, though I make bold to say you never will. It's dollars to cents that the undersigned keeps in business on the road as long as he sees fit, and then retires, never again to be heard of by you.

"Who takes the bet?

"I propose to nail this to Rob Bradstreet's door, just to let him see what I dare do. To day I shall ride through your city. All who desire may then look upon my noble self. Life is short; changes will take place; men come and go; a bird in the hand is worth a dozen in the bush; so do not miss what may be the last chance to see the subscriber."

"DICK TURPIN, OF LEADVILLE."

He who was reading this notice turned toward him who had nailed it up, a mixture of surprise and incredulity on his face. He saw a man in cloak and slouched hat, who good-humoredly nodded.

"Yes, it's a square deal; I'm Turpin," he nonchalantly explained. "Will you please call the sheriff?"

But at that moment Bradstreet, himself, came out, and the outlaw coolly saluted him:

"Hallo, old man! Going to turn your office into a hash-house? I see some sort of sign over your door which may be a bill of fare."

But Bradstreet had no eyes for the sign; he saw only the man on the black horse. Could he believe his eyes? Was it possible that Dick Turpin had been so mad as to come to the heart of the city?

Only a moment he looked in amazement, and then he jerked his revolver from his pocket.

Dick Turpin laughed mockingly, wheeled and dashed away. Crack! went the sheriff's revolver, and then, as he saw that he had missed, he ran into the street, shouting loudly to arouse the people to a sense of the situation.

The Lion waved a farewell as he shot away, and, after that, never looked around. He put the black horse to a gallop, and they shot through the street at a pace which made every one stare at them, but, alas! for Robert Bradstreet's hopes, he was left too far behind to be a feature in the case, and no one by the way realized who the rider was until it was too late to stop him.

He passed the last house of the city proper in safety, and then flung up the rim of his hat with a laugh.

"So much for them. Once more I've shown them how I can defy them, and I reckon they will not forget it soon. Perhaps if they keep my placard and read it over later, they'll see the point contained in the last sentence, even as they will no more see the Lion of Leadville. Now for the cave and the boys. I'll get them together, sing our war-song over once more, and then—farewell Dick Turpin! Providence permitting, this is my last day as an outlaw, and in the new home I'll try to forget this wretched, villainous career on the road. Pray Heaven that Lois may never know what I've been!"

And then his head drooped and he rode in silence.

That night he was to be married to Lois Legrand, and, by the dawning of another day, he hoped to be miles away with his bride.

His conscience smote him at the thought of making her his wife with his dark past kept secret; but, though he regretted his misspent

life, he could not summon resolution enough to tell her all and abide by the result.

That the future might atone for the past, was his earnest wish.

In due time he reached the cave. None of the men suspected his intention of deserting them, but, as he had already taken leave of the people of Leadville, so he proposed to take leave of his road-men, after a fashion.

Making a good excuse, he called them together, and, as often happened, they sung several songs of wild or martial character. Among others was one composed expressly for them by their dashing leader, and when it was rendered by broad-shouldered mountaineers, it veritably "made the echoes ring."

Never before had Dick Turpin put more vim into his own part of the work, and when the song was sung they gave three cheers for the leader whose reckless daring compelled their heartiest admiration.

While this was taking place, there was one observer of the scene who did not add voice to the song or the cheers; from a recess at one side, Red Kit watched with gleaming eyes, clinched hands, and a quick, short, unnatural way of breathing, which made her bosom rise and fall almost convulsively.

She knew what that scene meant!

She knew that in a short time Dick Turpin would leave the cave to seek his promised bride, and utter his marriage vows, and that he was taking the only farewell of his men which was safe under the circumstances.

Had he seen her, Dick Turpin might have been troubled, but, for some days, she had avoided him. They had had one talk after Red Kit's discovery, but she made no mention of Lois, and the Lion did not suspect that his secret was known.

He had tried to reconcile the girl to the unalterable, but with poor success. When she saw that nothing could bring him to her, she had become sullen and moody. The men of the band no longer called her the Wasp. Her store of sport and repartee had vanished, and she was more like an unquiet ghost than anything else as she flitted through the cave.

No mind there was more active than hers, however, and her course was fully decided upon.

When the singing and cheers were past, she silently retreated from the niche, and, going to her private room, donned her outer garments. This done, she went to where the horses were kept, saddled her own, mounted and rode away from the cave and toward Leadville.

What a vast change a few days had made in the girl! Before, she had been open, frank, happy, and full of bright enjoyment of life. Now, her face looked older, far older; and its expression was dark, sullen and forbidding.

Well might Dick Turpin tremble had he known all.

Straight to Leadville she rode, and to Sheriff Bradstreet's office. Her face was strangely pale, but it bore a fixed expression, and she did not hesitate for a moment. She was soon in the sheriff's presence. He had been talking with Jude Peterson, and both men looked indifferently at the visitor.

Her quick gaze flashed from one to the other, and then settled on the leader.

"Are you Sheriff Bradstreet?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"I've got news for your private ear, then—unless the other man is an officer."

"He is an officer, and you can speak freely."

"Do you want Dick Turpin?"

The question was abruptly flung at them, and their indifference vanished in a moment.

"Do I want him?" echoed Bradstreet. "Well, I should say I do! Why do you ask? Do you know anything about the man?"

"Yes."

"Give me news which shall lead to his capture, and you shall be well rewarded."

The girl made a quick gesture of aversion.

"I want none of your blood-money!" she exclaimed. "Don't speak of it again. All I want is to—see law and order triumph."

The flimsy excuse was with difficulty made.

"Well, tell us where to find Turpin."

"Do you know where Raoul Legrand lives?"

Bradstreet shook his head, but Jude Peterson promptly answered.

"Over near Whistling Canyon. Legrand is superintendent of the Gold Bug Mine."

"That's the place," said Red Kit, with a quick nod. "Go there to-night, at eight o'clock, and you can catch Dick Turpin. He's going to marry Legrand's girl."

"The dickens he is!" exclaimed Bradstreet. "Is this a square deal, young woman?"

"Yes; you'll find all just as I say. Over there Dick Turpin is known as Richard Barnes, though, of course," here she spoke slowly, for the lie came hard, "Legrand's girl knows just who he is."

"By the eternal!" cried the sheriff, "if this proves to be on the square, it's the best thing of the age. But who are you who thus gives him away?"

"No matter!" Red Kit curtly replied.

Jude Peterson leaned toward his leader and whispered:

"A cast-off favorite, probably."

Bradstreet nodded, and then again addressed Kit:

"How did you get the point, my girl?"

"No matter!" she repeated. "You needn't go to pouring in questions on me, for I won't answer them. I've told you all you need to know, and you can take him or leave him. I advise you to strike before the marriage takes place, or Dick may slip through your fingers like a shadow."

"Never fear; I'll do the work in time. Dick Turpin don't marry in my district like an ordinary man, when I am 'onto' his game."

"Good! I'm going now."

Red Kit turned abruptly toward the door. The sheriff would have stopped her, but Jude made a quick motion and she was allowed to go. Then the police spy spoke quickly:

"I think we have a chance to make a double strike here. I'll wager a good deal that jealousy is at the bottom of all this; probably this girl is an inmate of Turpin's cave; his one-time but discarded favorite. I'll put Foxfoot Frank on her track; he shall follow her to the cave; and then we'll have not only Turpin but the whole gang."

"Bravo! Do it at once!"

Peterson rushed into a rear room and aroused a lithe, long-haired man who was sleeping there. A few words sufficed to explain what he was to do, and as Red Kit rode away, he might have been seen gliding along in crafty, skillful pursuit.

"And now," said Bradstreet, rubbing his hands, "we will soon have the Lion of Leadville in a snare. Get together twenty of our best men, Jude, arm them to the teeth, and make preparations for the march. Ha! ha! Dick Turpin shall find uninvited guests at his wedding!"

CHAPTER VI.
THE BLOW FALLS.

EVENING!

All was happiness at Raoul Legrand's. In a short time, if nothing occurred to prevent, Lois would become Mrs. Barnes, and the old folks were as well satisfied as the young ones. Plain, honest Legrand had a high opinion of his prospective son-in-law, and none of the family suspected what Barnes really was.

Legrand had expressed a desire to have "the boys" from the mine of which he was superintendent down to enjoy the evening, but the two parties nearest concerned had insisted on a private marriage, so no outsiders were to be there.

In the morning the young couple were to start for the groom's ranch, where Mr. and Mrs. Legrand were to join them the next day, and then all were to go to Dakota.

The Lion of Leadville anticipated no great trouble in making the passage. Of course he must go with uncovered face, but no one save the Legrands outside his own band—and but few of them—knew the face of Dick Turpin.

It seemed safe enough, and Dick had a trump card to play, if necessary.

Reference has been made to the fact that he resembled Sheriff Bradstreet. The resemblance was remarkable; two men nearer alike could not have been found in a year's search. Knowing this, it was Turpin's intention, if he was stopped on the road, to pass himself as Bradstreet, himself. This was not a wild idea; he believed that he could go to Leadville when the sheriff was away, transact official business, meet all of Bradstreet's associates, and never create a suspicion of his identity.

Shortly before the hour appointed for the ceremony, the minister—a feeble old man whose sole characteristic was unbounded goodness of heart—arrived, accompanied by a single man selected from among the miners as a witness.

It was the habit of the Reverend Mr. Chester to regard all young people as children, and he devoted half an hour to talking with Dick and Lois, as though the approaching event was to be a children's picnic or something of the kind.

Preparations were then made for the marriage.

The young people arose, and Dick's face was full of grave joy. This was the first step toward escaping from his old life and becoming an honest man, and his heart was full of hope. That the dark past might be forgotten in the sacred light of the future was his one great desire.

But as Mr. Chester was about to begin the ceremony, a thundering knock sounded at the door.

All paused, and a quick light shot into Dick Turpin's eyes. That imperative summons might mean nothing unusual, but his fears suggested the worst.

Raoul Legrand moved irritably toward the outer door, and Dick followed. The heavy knock was repeated, causing Legrand to growl a curse on the applicant; but the Lion of Leadville glided past him, and took position where the door, when it swung back, would hide him from view.

Legrand opened the door, and Wild Dick, looking secretly, saw Sheriff Bradstreet and several other men. The worst had come; Bradstreet had not forgotten him, and at last the odds were against him—terribly against him.

The sheriff stepped inside.

"Where's Richard Barnes?" he demanded.
 "Where is he?" Legrand retorted. "Well, he ain't to be seen now. If you have business with him, you'll have to come some other time."
 "My business won't wait."
 "It'll have to wait."

"No, it won't! I'm the Sheriff of Leadville, and I am here to arrest the gay Richard. Stand aside, old man!"

He tried to pass, but Legrand caught his arm.

"Hold!" he said. "You go in there at your peril—"

With a quick movement Bradstreet flung himself aside and strode into the next room, one of his men close beside him. There he saw Lois in her bridal dress, pale and frightened, but there was no sign of the man he sought.

Holding his revolver ready for use, the officer glanced sharply around.

"Where is Dick Turpin?" he cried.

Ay! where was Wild Dick? From the first he had felt sure that the house was too completely surrounded by Bradstreet's men to make escape possible then, but he was far from giving up hope. The sole light in the cabin, then burning, was a kerosene lamp, which was suspended from the ceiling like a chandelier. He determined to "shoot this out," and depend on the ensuing confusion to give him a chance for escape.

He had drawn his revolver, and, at this moment, he fired.

There was a crash of glass and down came the lamp, but not just as Wild Dick wished. For once his hand had been unsteady, and the bullet did no more than to break the chimney and sever the wire which held the light.

The lamp fell, and, as the sheriff chanced to be directly under it, struck him on the head and knocked him to the floor. Then the lamp also struck there, breaking into pieces.

Next came a bright flash which lit the room more distinctly than ever, and Turpin saw that the scattered oil was on fire—worse than that, the flame had flashed to the sheriff's bespattered garments and person, threatening to fatally burn him.

Every one else stood confused and alarmed, but Wild Dick did not lose his wits. Near him hung a blanket, and he seized it, sprung forward and wrapped it around the imperiled man.

From the first he knew that he had an unconscious form in his grasp, for Bradstreet did not stir, but the rescuer labored faithfully to save him. The fire was now confining itself to Bradstreet—and his would-be helper. Turpin felt the flames blistering his hands and face, but he would not pause.

He had greater reasons for saving Robert Bradstreet than any one there suspected!

Fire works rapidly, and it was well that he soon had it under control. With the aid of the blanket he succeeded in extinguishing the last point of flame, but, if the sheriff was saved, the situation had become ominous for Turpin. Although the room was now intensely dark he knew that a light would soon be produced, and then his deed of mercy would pass as nothing. The room was crowded with the followers of the sheriff—perhaps they would lynch their prisoner on the spot.

What was to be done?

Daring Dick's head had never been clearer, and he at once conceived a bold scheme. With rapid hands he tore off his coat and Bradstreet's, and made an exchange, putting his upon the sheriff, and the sheriff's on his own shoulders. Then, when he had found and assumed Bradstreet's hat, he spoke in a loud voice:

"A light here! Bring a light at once!"

None of the inmates of the house would, and the first light obtained was a lantern brought by the men of Leadville.

Then a strange scene was revealed.

The minister was on his knees in prayer, Lois had fainted, Legrand held his wife in his arms, and two men lay on the floor as though dead.

One of these was Robert Bradstreet, who presented a pitiful appearance. His hair was scorched and shriveled, and his face blackened and blistered, while the coat which was to have been a bridal garment was badly burned.

Above him stood a man who presented almost as bad an appearance, though he bore himself strongly. His face, too, was black, his hair singed, and his coat even worse burned than that worn by Bradstreet.

A hand was laid on this man's shoulder, and he turned and saw Jude Peterson.

"Great heavens, sheriff, are you badly hurt?" the police spy anxiously asked.

"I think not, Jude. Only a slight scorching."

"But you look terribly. Here, Doc Hughes, see to our leader."

But their "leader" motioned them away. The black stuff on his face was an excellent disguise; if that was washed away the cheat might be discovered, and some one announce that he was not Sheriff Bradstreet, but Dick Turpin. So far his trick had worked well, and he trusted to his remarkable resemblance to the sheriff to enable him to keep it up until he could effect an escape.

"Let us see to the others. Dick Turpin is in a bad way—perhaps dead—and this other man;

he is of our own party. See what is wrong with him."

Attention was thus directed to the second of the prostrate men, before mentioned, and as "Doc" Hughes bent over him, he uttered a cry.

"Abe Knowlton is dead!" he exclaimed. "He's got a bullet through his heart!"

The man had been a favorite in Leadville, and his sudden death filled all with dumb dismay. It was Jude Peterson who spoke first.

"Who has done this?" he cried.

One of the Leadville party stepped forward and leveled a finger at Raoul Legrand.

"'Twas him!" he asserted.

All eyes were turned on the stout miner, but he started forward like an aroused tiger.

"You lie!" he cried. "You contemptible knave, there is no spark of truth in it. You lie!"

His honest and indignant denial impressed nearly all who heard it, and Jude doubtfully asked:

"Did you see him do it?"

"I looked in through the door and saw him with a revolver held out. It was toward Abe, an' thar ain't no doubt but he did it."

"I had the revolver," Legrand admitted, "but I have not fired at any one."

"Let me see it," Jude directed.

The revolver was passed over, and the police spy quickly examined it.

"One chamber empty, and fresh smoke around the muzzle and cylinder. This looks bad!"

Legrand had started, and a troubled look appeared on his face, but he quickly explained:

"I fired at a night-bird, an hour or so ago."

"That won't wash; too thin!" Jude exclaimed. "Am I not right, sheriff?"

Dick Turpin had been listening with a troubled expression on his face. He, too, was ignorant of how Knowlton came to his death. That he was the man who had first come in with the sheriff was clear, but he had not seen any one shoot, nor heard a fall. The whole affair was a mystery, but, feeling sure that Raoul Legrand was innocent, he determined to use his power as sheriff *pro tem.* to help him.

As long as no one discovered that he was a spurious official, he had the leading voice there. He had closely watched Jude, whose eyes, he felt, were the keenest there, and was confident that he was so far unsuspected.

He now added his voice:

"Can no one here explain how Abe died?"

No one *did* explain definitely, but the suspicion set afloat on a mere nothing had borne fruit. Abe had been popular, and the men glared at Legrand in a way not to be mistaken. Less than one quarter of them were officers, and the lynch-law spirit was rampant with the others.

Clearly, the safest place for Legrand, until his innocence was proven, was in the hands of the law. This would, at least, save him from violent death.

The Lion of Leadville had never found his energies more taxed. More than human wit and wisdom seemed to be needed then. Abe Knowlton was dead, and Legrand accused of the deed; Dick Turpin was masquerading in a role which needed all his coolness; the real sheriff lay motionless on the floor, perhaps dead, or at any moment liable to return to consciousness and expose the cheat; and over on the sofa Lois lay in a swoon, uncared for except by the prayers which the old minister was earnestly sending up to Heaven.

The sight of the woman he loved; whom he had hoped to now call his wife; lying there almost like one dead, cut to the road-agent's very heart, and it was only with a great effort that he forced himself to keep away from her and carry on his deceit.

CHAPTER VII.

DESOLATION!

DICK TURPIN saw that all the others were looking to him for directions, and that he must act in his usurped role of sheriff, so he put all else aside and went about his work with a will, and if all the world had been under his command he could not have acted more coolly and naturally.

Raoul Legrand he put under arrest; Mrs. Legrand was directed to care for Lois; Abe Knowlton's body was taken away; and then particular attention was given the unconscious man whom all supposed to be the Lion of Leadville.

"Doc" Hughes had been an Eastern medical student until he got into some trouble and had to move out rather abruptly, and was really possessed of sound medical knowledge and judgment.

He examined the injured man carefully, and then gravely shook his head.

His patient was badly burned, and these injuries alone would keep him in the "repair shop" for some time, as he expressed it, but there seemed to be something more. After carefully examining the unconscious man's head, he asked if any one had "hit the outlaw" in that place.

Nobody would acknowledge having done so, but the real Dick Turpin then conceived a theory. He remembered that, when he shot away the lamp, it had fallen directly on the sheriff's head. Was it possible that the concussion of

brain, or fracture of skull, of which Hughes expressed fears, had been thus caused? The lamp was heavy, and it had fallen several feet before striking Bradstreet. This, then, was undoubtedly the correct explanation, but Bradstreet's counterfeit did not say so.

He saw that, owing to the fact that every one had been confused and alarmed, and only a few in the room to see anything at all, no one was able to comprehend what had occurred, and he determined to make the most of it.

He therefore suggested that Knowlton's death and the supposed Turpin's injuries might be the result of a personal encounter between the two, and was pleased to see that the theory found favor with some.

The time had now come when the road-agent, acting in his assumed capacity, might have left the house and escaped, but there was a reason why he dared not.

Such of the men as attributed Knowlton's death to Legrand were very bitter against the latter, and there was actual danger that the miner would be lynched before Leadville was reached.

No; Dick could not, would not, go until this danger was guarded against, and there was no way but to go to Leadville and see him placed in prison, or to rescue him by the way.

The Lion was anxious to get away. Under her mother's care Lois had partially regained consciousness, and Dick feared when she saw him his disguise would be penetrated, and he be unmasked by her without any idea of the damage she would do.

He therefore ordered the return to be made at once.

The house was placed in charge of the old minister and the man he had brought with him when he came; and at the request of the supposed sheriff, the latter promised to remain there and protect the two ladies from possible foes. This was all that Dick could then do for his affianced.

The return to Leadville was begun. Legrand went as a prisoner, despite all his protestations. Knowlton's body was bound to a horse, and the supposed Dick Turpin would have gone in the same way had not the counterfeit sheriff used authority, and ordered that he be carefully conveyed on a litter.

The injured man's condition was a profound conundrum for Dick to consider. Was he badly injured? Would he recover consciousness and reason? If he did the latter, the Lion of Leadville would find himself in a bad fix.

It was a melancholy ride for Dick Turpin. By that time he had hoped to call Lois his wife, and to be soon where his road-name was unknown. Instead—what a calamity the evening had brought forth!

"I might have known it!" he thought, bitterly. "The only good luck of my miserable life has come to me as Dick Turpin. When I've tried to lead an honest life the whole world has been against me, and misfortune has ever dogged my steps. I am the foot-ball of fate, and worse than the ugly cur that skulks along the gutter, searching for a bone, and cursed and stoned by all who see him!"

At this moment Jude Peterson rode to his side.

"Well, we have done well, sheriff," he said. "It has been a good night's work."

"I am proud of it," Turpin replied, with concealed sarcasm.

"The Lion of Leadville has had a downfall."

"To the lowest depths," the outlaw coincided.

"If the other band does as well, it will be a great thing for us."

"Just so," replied Dick, although he had no idea what the police spy referred to.

"We owe a good deal to that little, red-headed girl. There's no doubt as to the correctness of my theory, I think. Just consider it! She had been Turpin's favorite, but he tired of her and made love to the Legrand girl. Result, when red-head learned it all, she came straight to us and gave the outlaw dead away. It's only an illustration of what Congreve wrote:

"Heaven hath no rage like love to hatred turned,
 Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

A sudden light flashed upon Dick, and he realized what he would a few days before have found hard to believe. All this woe was due to Red Kit! She it was who had betrayed him, and he felt like echoing Jude's quotation. Red Kit had done that which he considered well suited to fiendish origin—and she had seemed such an innocent, happy child before her unfortunate love for him poisoned her conscience.

He was almost stunned by the news, but, like one in a dream, he heard Peterson continue:

"As long as our man has learned the secret of the outlaw cave, I see no reasonable fear of failure there. If the gang can be taken by surprise, our boys will sweep all before them; and that will be the last of the road-agents."

"True."

"Evidently, it never occurred to the little red-head that we would send a man to dog her to the cave."

"Probably not."

"Well, now, sheriff, one word about the Le-grand girl. Did you notice her?"

"Not particularly."

"She's a good one. Now, Brad, I've got an eye for female loveliness, and sweet Lois just fills my eye. I propose to step into Dick Turpin's vacant shoes, and scoop in all that concentrated beauty myself."

Jude Peterson would not have chuckled so loudly had he known who rode by his side. The wretch would have fled in terror had he known how near he was then to violent death. Dick Turpin's blood boiled. The idea of this wretch daring to couple Lois's name with his own seemed positive sacrilege, and it was only by a powerful effort that the Lion curbed his impulse to strike the spy to his feet.

Luckily, it occurred to him that he still had the means of protecting his promised bride.

His voice was wonderfully calm as he replied:

"We have no time to think of such matters now. Wait till we get our city purified—which won't be until Dick Turpin is disposed of."

"I'm afraid he will die without recovering his senses. I hope not; I want to see him hung."

"Probably there is no love lost, Jude."

At this point the trail narrowed and Dick managed to free himself from the spy's immediate company. They went on and, in due time, reached Leadville.

They found the city a scene of rejoicing. The second party, to which Jude had referred, had been as successful as the first. The road-agents' cave had been invaded; the occupants were taken by surprise; and in the fight which followed they made so poor a show that, though they fought desperately, they were practically annihilated.

Not a prisoner had been taken, however.

A part of the band had escaped, but nearly all had been shot down, when they refused to surrender, and, to use the words of the leader of the victorious party, "the cave ran red with blood."

Dick Turpin grew sick at heart as he heard the recital. These men had been rougher, ruder, more criminal than he, but they had been his companions for many a day, and had served him faithfully; more than that, he knew that, as a leader, they had loved him.

And now they had been butchered like so many sheep.

One person, and one only, was responsible for it all—Red Kit, the Wasp!

Dick Turpin shivered and asked after the girl, but no one had seen her at the cave. Probably she had time to make a successful retreat.

Leadville was intoxicated with triumph, and, for hours, a general jollification was kept up. The road-agents were annihilated, and the Lion a prisoner. Truly, they had cause to rejoice, and all over the place could be heard cheers for Sheriff Bradstreet.

Little did they suspect that the miserable man whom they cheered at sight, even as he was cheered when out of sight, was the most wretched man in the whole city. Little did they suspect, when he forced himself to smilingly answer their congratulations, that he was wishing that he might again place himself at the head of his gallant, though outlawed, band, and sweep Leadville from the face of the earth.

It was, in truth, the darkest night of Dick Turpin's life.

Day was breaking, and four persons hovered in a recess among the rocks, high on the mountain-side. Two of them were men! the third, Mrs. Hallock; the fourth, Red Kit, the Wasp.

The cold, gray dawn showed a circle of anxious faces, but Red Kit's was ghastly. Every vestige of color was gone, and she looked older than her mother. While the others talked she stared straight ahead at vacancy, saying nothing. In her eyes was a horror not born of the events of the past; in her heart an awful dread which only the future could settle for weal or woe.

Slow, heavy footsteps sounded, and then Duke Hallock appeared, his face pale and troubled. He dropped on the ground in silence.

"Well," cried one of the other men, "what news?"

"The worst!" was the hoarse reply. "Dick Turpin is a prisoner in Leadville—and dying!"

There was a smothered cry, like the wail of a broken heart, and Red Kit fell forward on the ground, as unconscious as the grim, pitiless rocks around her.

CHAPTER VIII. JUDE PAYS A VISIT.

MORNING.

Wild Dick Turpin had not closed his eyes in slumber, but he had had a chance to consider the situation and map out his course. If it had not been for the perilous situation of Raoul Legrand, he would have hastened to Lois, explained all, and tried to induce her to flee to a distant place; but this would not do while her father was in trouble.

He felt sure that Legrand was not responsible

for Abe Knowlton's death, but it was not so easy to convince others. They would have it that he was the murderer, and only that he was in jail, with several men to guard him, the lynchers would have taken matters into their own hands.

The counterfeit sheriff had done wisely when he put him under arrest, thus foiling the lynchers, but he might now find it hard work to baffle the regular engine of law.

The first report of the morning was in regard to him whom men persisted in calling Dick Turpin. The unfortunate man had recovered bodily activity, but his mind was a blank, and the doctors said he would either die from concussion of the brain or pass through a siege of brain fever.

His burns were painful and disfiguring, but they were not likely to do any lasting damage. The blow on the head was what caused apprehension, and that alone.

No one suspected that the injured man was really Robert Bradstreet. The burning of his face, the singeing of his long hair and mustache, and the bandages now wound around his head, combined to make a disguise.

Dick Turpin perceived that he was for the time safe in his assumed role, so far as personal appearance went. Probably his remarkable likeness to Bradstreet would have saved him anyway; but, as one side of his heavy mustache was burned away, he saw fit to have it shaved entirely off, and wore a cloth over one cheek, which was slightly blistered.

His one great danger now was that he would betray his unfamiliarity with police and social affairs in the city. He needed to be constantly on his guard.

All this he realized, but not yet did he suspect just what he had exposed himself to when he assumed Sheriff Bradstreet's identity.

He was early at his new office, and resolved to coolly grapple with all difficulties; but it was considerably later when Jude Peterson appeared. When Dick cautioned the real sheriff in regard to Jude, in Rattlesnake Gulch, he had known very well what he was talking about, and had libeled the police spy in no way.

Now, however, he found himself obliged to show some courtesy to the villain. The real Bradstreet had trusted and even liked Jude—though how he could was a mystery—and if the false Bradstreet showed his aversion, it might cause trouble.

No; until he could safely abandon the position he had assumed through the force of circumstances, he must show proper civility in dealing with Jude.

Why Jude did not appear as early as usual may be briefly stated. After breakfast he went to a certain house, and was admitted by a certain woman, as on a previous occasion to which reference has been made. Between this woman and Jude a likeness existed, though she was by far the more comely. She was no longer young, but once she must have been moderately handsome.

Now, she reminded one of a person whose frame has been fed upon, and nearly worn out by unsatisfied love, hatred and ambition—a dangerous trio when they work together.

"I've come as I promised, Meg," said the spy, "but I can't stop. This is a great time in Leadville, and I must be at work."

She made a fierce gesture of disdain.

"I thought the city had gone mad, last night."

"You know the cause, don't you?"

"Bah!—yes, I do. More fools they; how they howl and cry at a passing breath. Shakespeare knew what he was about when he pictured his typical mobs—the people. But enough of that. What of our own affairs?"

Jude shook his head.

"We must wait awhile."

The woman uttered a curse.

"Wait!" she repeated. "It is always 'wait' with you! Are we never to move? Must Robert Bradstreet forever tread these streets, unhumiliated, unstricken?"

"Be calm, Meg, for I assure you I am not to blame. I have done all that I could, and should no longer say 'wait,' were it not that the time is not ripe for action. Just now Bradstreet is the lion of Leadville—more so than Turpin ever was—and if I began work on him, and he gave a tip to the people, it would be just like them to string me up."

"Bah! you're afraid!"

"Afraid or not, I'm no fool," Jude calmly replied.

"You are all ice; that's what's the matter with you."

"And you're all fire, which is worse."

"I have the will to take revenge on Bradstreet for that old-time wrong, at any rate, and you haven't."

"I'll show him before I'm through with him," darkly replied the spy. "My rule is, slow and sure. I have come here, got a good position under Bradstreet, won his confidence, and done something toward feathering my own nest. If I am slow about striking, rest assured that he will squirm all the more when I put the screws on."

For once, Jude's strange smile expressed something; it was a wolfish craving for revenge in a

dark way. His lips parted and revealed his teeth, and there remained as though frozen.

Meg made an impatient gesture, but no reply.

Finally Jude added:

"Dick Turpin lies in bed with a broken head. He may live, or may not; but if he does, it is possible that we may make a dollar off of him. Nobody pays better to a friend near the throne than criminals; I've found that out while faithfully serving Rob Bradstreet. Turpin must be rich, and if I should find him able to travel, by and by, I'll see what he'll pay for liberty."

"All these minor schemes mean nothing."

"They mean money!" drily replied Peterson.

"What is money compared to revenge?" fiercely cried the woman, her thin hands working nervously.

"We will have both. Do you hate Bradstreet more than I? No; but I bide my time. Have I not done well to mask my real feelings, and worm my way into his confidence as I've done? Oh! rest assured that he shall squirm in the end!"

Again the wolfish smile; again the dull sparkle in his evil eyes.

Not much longer did Jude remain there. He wanted to see how everything was working around the city, and he went at once to the sheriff's office. The counterfeit Bradstreet received him cordially, and Jude consoled with him for the burn behind the bandage, and the loss of his fine mustache.

He observed that this changed the "sheriff's" appearance considerably, but, like every one else, the spy was unsuspicious of the truth.

Dick Turpin carried himself boldly in his false character. He had the "nerve" to carry him through, if that was all that was needed, and was trying to rapidly master the details of affairs about him.

During the day he sent a messenger to the Legrand cottage, and received word that Lois was confined to her bed by the effects of the terrible night. He longed to send her word that he was alive and well, but dared not. Now that she knew his real character, would she not despise him? Again, if he revealed his present position to her, could he convince her that he had acted for the best in placing her father under arrest?

Deeply as he loved her, he could not blind himself to the fact that logic generally falls on deaf ears when addressed to a woman.

No, he must keep his secret, and try to work out the tangled web alone; so he contented himself with sending four men to the house with orders to protect the woman from possible enemies at peril of their lives.

Late in the afternoon Dick sat alone in the sheriff's office, engaged in reading the papers which Bradstreet had carefully arranged in his desk. These gave much necessary information about official affairs.

Suddenly there was a rustling of female garments, and he raised his head. Before him stood a woman, with two children by her side.

They were strangers to him, and he waited to see by the woman's actions whether he ought to recognize them. The doubt seemed about settled when the woman rushed forward, and, before Dick comprehended her intention, flung her arms about his neck.

"Oh! Rob; my dear, dear Rob!" she exclaimed.

The bold outlaw looked alarmed, for once. There are times when man likes to be wooed by woman, and times when he does not. The present case was of the second kind. Turpin was still in doubt as to just what he ought to do when the woman added:

"My dear, dear husband! am I once more with you?"

That settled it. Dick had never heard that the sheriff had a wife, but, if he had a dozen of them, he did not propose to so far usurp his place as to be burdened with families whose very names were unknown to him.

He gently, but firmly, removed her arms.

"My good woman," he said gravely, "there is some mistake here. I don't know you."

"Rob!"

"I am Sheriff Bradstreet," he stiffly amended.

"Your name is Rob Edwards, and you are my husband," she persisted, evidently wavering between anger and sorrow.

"Wrong! My name is not Edwards."

"Rob, how can you say that?" was the reproachful reply. "I have come to you, ready to forgive all, if, indeed, you are to blame—which I never believed. Will you reject me—and the children?"

She pushed them forward—one a stout boy of five, the other a pretty girl somewhat younger—but he shook his head obstinately. Perhaps to decline this woman would be to endanger his own position, but accept her he would not. He saw the need of learning who she was, however.

"Madam, there is a chair. Will you sit down and explain?"

She dropped into the seat.

"I don't know why you act so strangely," she said plaintively.

"We will try to explain," grimly replied Dick.

"You say that my name is Edwards. Well, suppose you tell what else you know about me."

Her face grew sad and troubled.

"Is this a jest, Rob?"

"I regard it as anything else, but am waiting to hear from you. Tell me about Rob Edwards—and yourself. Who are you? Where are you from? When did you know Rob Edwards?"

"Why need I tell all this?" she plaintively asked.

"Believe me, it is necessary. Go on!"

She sighed deeply, and then began. The boy realized that his mother was in trouble, and that the "sheriff" was the cause of her sorrow, so he doubled his tiny fists and looked at him most belligerently.

"I met you at Batesville, Arkansas, seven years ago," the woman explained. "I was then Sibylla Marcy, the daughter of a poor but honest farmer. You came with plenty of money and seemed to be a gentleman of leisure. We met, loved and were married; and after that we lived together three years. These are the children born to us during that time.

"Then you disappeared as completely as though the ground had swallowed you up, leaving no word for me. I mourned for you as dead until a few weeks ago, when a wandering neighbor told me he had seen you here, where you lived as Sheriff Bradstreet. I could not believe that you had willingly deserted me, and, strong in the faith that there was a mystery which could be explained to our mutual satisfaction, I came to join you. Rob, I know that you will not say I am unwelcome!"

CHAPTER IX.

RED KIT REAPPEARS.

THE woman's voice was pathetic in the extreme, and, whatever were the facts of the case, he was of the opinion that she was sincere; that she believed she had found the lost Rob Edwards.

Dick Turpin was now in a quandary. He knew almost as much about Sheriff Bradstreet's life as that gentleman himself did, but there was a period of some years, exactly coinciding with what Sibylla had said, when he had lost all trace of him.

Had he then been in Arkansas, and there met and married Sibylla, or was it only another case of resemblance, and Rob Edwards a man with whom he had nothing to do?

If Sibylla's face and manners had been against her, Dick would then and there have avowed that he never saw her, and, ordering her from the office, forbade her under penalty of arrest to molest him further; but her appearance was in her favor, and he had no desire to deal harshly with a worthy woman.

But what was he to do? He could not, even indirectly, acknowledge that she was his wife.

For several seconds he sat in silence, debating this perplexing question, while the little woman watched him without speaking.

Finally he answered.

"This is something which needs time and careful attention, and I must ask you to go to a hotel and remain for a few days. Just now I am too busy to look into the matter."

"Look into it! Do you need to investigate to know whether you are willing to receive your wife?" she reproachfully asked.

"You don't understand," said Dick, desperately. "I am—a—that is—peculiarly situated, and, just now, I can't acknowledge anybody as my wife."

So said the Lion of Leadville, but, the next instant, he felt like kicking himself across the room for a blockhead. It was an awkward speech at the best, and Sibylla's eyes dilated with sudden fear.

"Rob, have you another wife?" she faintly asked.

"No; great heavens! no! What put that idea into your head? Rest easy on that score. But, you see, the life of a public man is a peculiar one, and that is why I ask for time in this case. My dear madam, you look sensible, and I trust you will prove so. Now, will you go to a hotel, register as Mrs. Sibylla Marcy, and remain perfectly silent to all until I can—a—settle this case?"

"I don't see why I need to?"

"You shall know later."

"But I have only a little money."

"I will give you all—double what you need."

She was still reluctant, but, as he persisted, she finally yielded, giving as a reason that her love for him would lead her to obey where her judgment protested. She then tried to exact an admission of the truth of her statements, and to have him notice the children, but Turpin had to draw the line somewhere, and he would not go as far as that.

Sibylla sadly agreed to go to the hotel, and, until he gave her leave to speak, to remain silent on all these points, and Dick had just breathed a sigh of relief when Jude Peterson entered.

The spy glanced from the woman to his supposed chief and back again. Women were not unusual visitors in the office, but Dick saw a shade of suspicion on the fellow's face.

He determined to rush matters.

"Mr. Peterson, will you take these people to the Occidental Hotel?" he briskly asked.

Jude turned toward Sibylla, but, as she caught his eye, she saw there something which made her shrink back; why, she could not have told,

but a shiver ran over her, and she felt as though menaced by a rattlesnake.

"Never mind!" she said, hurriedly. "I can find my way alone. I will not trouble any one. I will go now."

She gathered her children closer to her, with the instinct common to all living creatures when danger is near, and moved toward the door.

Jude's lips parted in his nameless smile, which was now almost a sneer, but he fell back and bowed politely. The woman and her children passed out of the office, and then the spy turned his gaze on Turpin.

"Who are they?" he bluntly asked.

"A lady I knew some years ago," carelessly replied the Lion. "She will stop awhile in the city, and be under my charge. Any news, Jude?"

Jude knew of none, and, the conversation thus turned, Dick managed to keep it away from Sibylla until he could send the spy on an errand. Once more alone, he devoted some time to considering the new complication.

It seemed that, in assuming Bradstreet's identity, he had assumed more than he knew. As modest and gentle as Sibylla appeared, she might yet be the means of getting him into serious difficulty, and he wished that she had delayed her appearance. Whether she was the legal wife of the sheriff, he did not know, and, in any case, he did not want the settling of the matter. If Bradstreet and Edwards were one, it looked as though he must have a motive for deserting her, and it might yet appear that she was not as meek as she seemed.

Dick Turpin felt troubled. The outlook was not favorable. He had done all that was possible during the day to turn public sentiment in Legrand's favor, but, despite this, it had grown stronger against him. Rejecting all other theories, the people would have it that the miner had deliberately shot Knowlton.

Even Dick was puzzled to account for the man's taking off. He had heard no revolver-shot except his own, but, in the confusion, this was not so very strange.

His theory was that, when Bradstreet fell, his revolver had fallen, discharged itself, and killed Knowlton. This weapon, however, had mysteriously disappeared. It could not be found to operate for, or against, Legrand, though Turpin knew that the sheriff was holding it in his hand when he fell.

The road-agent would have liberated Legrand, but there were two reasons why he should not.

First, Lois was sick, unable to leave her room, and he feared that if the people of Leadville knew all, they would, in their fierce wrath, forget that she was a woman and visit others' sins upon her.

Secondly, Turpin had himself placed Legrand under arrest, and stationed a strong guard over him, and he had no means of overcoming this guard. The dashing band which had followed him no longer existed.

The Lion of Leadville now had only his own efforts to rely upon.

He was thinking of all this when, once more, there was a rustling at the door and he looked up. When he did so his blood began to bound fiercely through his veins, and he had never been more the "Lion" of Leadville than then.

Red Kit, the Wasp, stood before him!

Yes, there she was, but very different from the old Kit. Her brick-red hair was in wild disorder; her picturesque dress soiled and torn; her face pale and old of appearance; and her eyes burning as though with fever.

This—this was the person to whom Dick Turpin owed all his troubles; the massacre of his band, the illness of Lois and the destruction of his dearest hopes; and it was only with a mighty effort that he kept his hands away from her. Fierce was his desire for vengeance, and he grasped the edge of the desk as though he would rend the hard wood into splinters.

Yet he remembered his fictitious character, and felt that he had never needed greater self-control than then.

With a great endeavor he calmed his face and met her gaze steadily. She was looking at him doubtfully, and she now spoke slowly:

"You don't seem glad to see me."

"Have you more news?"

"No, sir."

"Well, what do you want then?"

His voice was brusque; almost harsh; and her fingers worked nervously on the gaudy shawl whose respectability had forever vanished. She might have been a tramp, so far as appearances went, and a most wretched, haggard one at that.

"I—I have come to ask a favor."

"Indeed! What is it?"

Wonderingly, Dick looked at the girl. He was now wholly himself, and took care that his voice should not awaken old recollections in her mind, even while he wondered what meant her trembling lips and desolate appearance.

Her gaze fell to the floor.

"I want to—to take care of Dick Turpin!"

"What?"

The road-agent had never been more astonished.

"I hear that he is sick," she explained, shrinkingly, "and in danger of death. I want—I

want to care for him, see that he wants for nothing, and—to be with him!"

Her manner was humble, and her speech broken, but, with man's stupidity in such cases, the hearer did not yet fully understand.

"This is all Greek to me," he admitted. "Is it Dick Turpin you are talking about? Why do you want to nurse the fellow? Possibly," here his voice grew hard and severe, "not content with betraying him, you want to be where you can administer a dose of poison."

Red Kit burst into tears, and then fell on her knees at the supposed sheriff's feet.

"Pity me! pity me!" she moaned. "I did betray him, but I love him!—I love him!"

Dick Turpin started back. Passionate, vehement and piteous was this declaration, and he was wholly unprepared for it. That Red Kit had loved him once he did not doubt, but, after what she had done, it seemed as though only the bitterest hatred could remain in her heart.

"You are mad!" he muttered.

"I was mad," she sobbed. "Mad and as wicked as perdition itself. I loved him, and I betrayed him to death!"

Still kneeling, she rocked herself back and forth, sobbing and moaning with a grief which almost approached frenzy.

"Well, you ought to have thought of that before," harshly replied Turpin.

"I was mad, mad!"

"Better go to an asylum. We have no use for you here. Let you nurse the sick man? Not much! I would just as soon trust a grizzly there. I shall be obliged to decline your offer. You are no longer useful to us, and, as even police officers despise traitors, the sooner you get away from here the better. Don't expect us to be your friends; we don't admire your sort!"

His words were not harsher than his manner, nor was his heart tenderer than either. As he remembered the misery the girl had brought upon him all his olden liking for her vanished, and he regretted that she was not a man, upon whom he might wreak his vengeance. True, she suffered now, but every moan was music to his ear.

She did not suffer more than Lois.

"Oh! sir," she implored, "have mercy on me. I am a miserable, wicked woman! I betrayed the man I loved, and he is now sick, perhaps dying. Let me go to him! Let me make amends, as far as I can, for my sin! Oh! sir, I love him better than my own life—don't refuse me; don't!"

Deep was her sorrow, but to Dick Turpin's mind came a picture of his slaughtered band; of Lois and his shattered hopes; and he coldly, harshly replied:

"There is the door, woman, and there lies your way! Go, and never let me see your face again. Go!"

"No, no; not that!" she cried. "Kill me, if you will, but don't send me away without seeing him. Take me to his side, and then—I will thank you to kill me!"

"If you want to die, look up some survivor of Dick Turpin's slaughtered band. I am told that, though seven men died in the cave, a few escaped. Go to one of those survivors and tell him that your hands are red with his comrades' blood, and, I think, it will be in his heart to kill you. I, however, am not a butcher of women. I only ask you to go. Once more—there is the door, and your way lies over the threshold. I will not tolerate your presence any longer, for the blood of murdered men is on your hands. There is the door! Go!"

CHAPTER X.

THE SPY UNDER THE WINDOW.

DICK TURPIN'S voice was inexorable.

With a heavy sigh Red Kit arose. Her tears no longer fell, and she had grown calmer, for the quiet of despair had fallen upon her. She knew, at last, that further words were hopeless. Secretly, she resolved to come again, hoping to find the supposed sheriff in a kinder mood, but, just then, she must accept his verdict.

"I want to say one thing more before I go," she observed, never looking at him. "Beware how you admit strangers to see Dick Turpin!"

"Why so?"

"Because his lieutenant, Duke Hallock, is one of those who still live, and he will have it that Dick betrayed the band; that it was he who gave you information."

"Indeed!"

"I have told him the truth, but he won't believe me. He thinks I am trying to shield Dick, and that the captain's injuries were the result of accident, not what you did to him willingly."

"Hallock is a fool!" tartly exclaimed Turpin. "He is like a madman because the band is destroyed, and very bitter toward Dick. He swears that if the captain recovers, he will find and kill him. I fear he will force his way to where Dick is, and murder him."

"Never fear; I'll take care of that. And the rest of the survivors of the band—are they of Hallock's mind?"

"No; he is alone in his way of thinking. Lasso Life, Revolver Rube and Bowie Ben all believe in Dick, especially Ben. He has quarreled with father on the subject and left us. Father—Duke Hallock—is the only one you need to fear. He is bold and cunning, and

may disguise himself and get to your prisoner, in spite of all your men."

"I'll see to that, and I thank you for your warning. If I've spoken too roughly to you, excuse me. There! there! don't let that encourage you to ask again; it is useless. Go, now!"

Red Kit sighed again, and then glided like a ghost from the office. How different were her movements a few weeks before! Then, she was the personification of life, activity, gayety and resistless sport.

Dick Turpin resumed his seat in a grave and thoughtful mood. Despite all that the girl had done he could not avoid a feeling of pity for her. Her face and manner showed what she had suffered; if she had brought ruin to all his plans and hopes, she, too, had tasted to the dregs of the cup of sorrow.

Visitors at the office were always numerous, but it seemed to Dick that they were by far too many when another walked in. This time it was a man, and what appeared to be a sleek young negro.

"Good-evening, sah," he said, with a bow and grin.

"Good-evening."

"Ef you please, sah, I've come fur a job."

"You'll have to look further, I've none for you."

"But, sah, let me s'plain. I's a s'perienced horspital nurse, an' I's come fur ter apply fur the job o' takin' care o' that des'prit road-adjutant w'ot is likely ter turn up his toes."

Dick Turpin shaded his face with his hands and looked keenly at the supposed negro.

"Why do you want the job?"

"Wal, sah, I's got ter work fur a livin', an' nussin' is right in my line o' biz."

"Did you ever see Turpin?"

"No, sah."

"Are you sure you don't want to help him away?"

"What! help sech a des'prit ruffian? Never, sah! I's more anxious ter pull on de rope w'ot is ter hang him."

"In that case you would not make a good nurse. Such a person should be free from prejudice."

"Golly, sah, I'll pull him fru ef it be possible."

"I don't think you are the proper man for the place."

"Why not, sah?"

"Because, despite the present color of your face, you are not a negro. More than that, I believe you were a member of Dick Turpin's band!"

As he spoke his hand dropped on a concealed revolver, under his desk, for he expected the other man to either run or draw a revolver, himself, but, instead, the "negro" stood still and coolly retorted:

"And I believe you to be Dick Turpin, himself!"

"Bowie Ben!"

"Captain!"

The two clasped hands earnestly, but on the self-styled negro's face was a look of puzzled surprise.

"I don't understand it all, but I'll swear that this is the Lion of Leadville, alive and well. What in the world does it mean?"

"Not so loud, Ben. If other ears drink in your words, I should be a doomed man. Why are you here?"

"Because I thought you was sick and in need of help. I proposed to nurse you through the pinch, and then rescue you. Such was my game, but here you are— But let me listen, while you talk."

"Ben, I can depend on you?"

"To the death!"

Dick Turpin believed him. Bowie Ben had been his favorite of all the band, and when Red Kit spoke of his loyalty, Dick was not surprised. Neither was he surprised that this loyalty had led him to adopt so bold a scheme to help and rescue his old leader. As Dick had seen him in this disguise, he had recognized him at once; but, though he grew gradually suspicious, so indifferent was the Lion to his disguise, Ben was not sure of his position until the captain saw fit to reveal his identity.

They now had an earnest conversation, in which Ben was told all that was necessary. Turpin was very anxious to have the real sheriff Bradstreet's life protected from enemies, and it had flashed upon him that Bowie Ben could do double duty there.

He could take care of the sick man, and, if the latter gave signs of returning consciousness, hasten to the counterfeit sheriff in time to give him a chance to flee.

"Yes, he would work in to very good advantage if he was so inclined. The result of the suggestion was highly satisfactory. Ben promptly agreed to take the place.

"I am told that Duke Hallock is very bitter against me," Dick continued.

"He thinks you betrayed the band, and swears that he will kill you if he can."

"Duke has lost his head. What of Revolver Rube and Lasso Lije?"

"They don't agree with him."

"Could they be trusted in this game?"

"No, no; don't think of it, captain. While

you run the band you had no more faithful men, but they are unscrupulous, and a game that promised no plunder would never suit them. Besides, I think they have gone further West. They regard you as a dethroned king, and now they seek fresh fields of action."

"Exit, Rube and Lije. Of the old band, only you and I, Duke, his wife and Kit remain."

"Poor Kit!"

Dick looked suspiciously at his companion. The latter was gazing at vacancy.

"She did an act which makes me shiver," added Ben, "but I believe she was not fully in her right mind. At any rate, she is almost a wreck, and—it was love for you drove her to it, captain."

"I used to think you fancied her."

Bowie Ben made a quick gesture.

"If I did, the grave of time holds that love, captain. We won't speak of it. I am a man, and can bear it."

"Let us hope that Kit will change her mind. She is young, and, with the majority of people, love is a plant that blossoms anew frequently. Red Kit I know to be good-hearted, and if she can only forget this foolish fancy of hers, she may yet make some man happy. Why not you, as well as any one else? You are—"

Dick suddenly ceased speaking.

Without the slightest warning, Bowie Ben had sprung through the open window and disappeared.

The captain started up in some alarm, and, as he heard sounds of a struggle under the window, hastened there.

He found Ben kneeling on a man whom he had overpowered and laid neatly on his back. The victor was perfectly cool, and he looked up at Turpin and said:

"A spy! He was listening under the window. What shall be done with him?"

"We'll have him inside."

Dick gave a hand, and the prisoner was landed in the office like a huge fish. He was not an evil-looking man naturally, but he glared at his captors in a hostile way now, and they could see nothing attractive.

"He's a spy," Ben repeated. "I saw his shadow, and then a slight sound, and though I did not know whether it was man or animal, I took the leap."

Turpin looked keenly at the captive. Unless he was mistaken it was one of Sheriff Bradstreet's immediate followers, and, as there could be no doubt that he had heard their conversation, the complication was a serious one. Whether he had heard enough to give him a clear idea of the situation, Dick now proposed to learn.

"Well, you're in fine business, ain't you?" he said, sharply, as he confronted the man.

"As fine as you!" was the defiant retort.

"What do you mean?"

"That I'm onto your racket."

"What racket?"

"Oh! come off; you know what I mean, and so do I know, Mister Sheriff Bradstreet, Esquire!"

"Give me any more of your insolence and I will put you under arrest."

"No, you won't. 'Cause why? You ain't no more a sheriff than I'm a sick poodle. You're a blamed counterfeit, you are; and, hang me, if I don't believe you are Dick Turpin, himself!"

The man had been drinking more than was good for him; that was plain; but it was also clear that he was a very dangerous person.

"Nonsense!" said Turpin, sharply.

"Perhaps the bona fide city officials will say so when I let them onto the racket. You needn't squirm, old man. You look as near like Rob Bradstreet as two peas look like each other, but your own words have betrayed you. I heard enough for that. You are Dick Turpin, and this is one of your men. His name I didn't ketch, though I did get some lingo about Red Kit, Rube, Lije, and so on. Seems like there is a mighty big game afoot, but if I don't foil it, my name ain't Sam Tobin!"

CHAPTER XI.

A WILD NIGHT RIDE.

TURPIN and Ben looked at each other irresolutely. It was clear that it would never do to let Mr. Sam Tobin go at large. He had knowledge that would ruin all their plans, and, when his story was told, place them in great peril. Thanks to the liquor he had drunk he had revealed his knowledge, which gave them one advantage.

Clearly, he must be kept from telling his story but how?

Had Dick been as desperate a ruffian as Leadville supposed him, this would soon have been settled; a knife would silence Tobin in short time; but it was far from being Dick's way to commit murder.

Tobin must be shut up somewhere, but where?

Now that the band was destroyed, there was no safe place, and no safe jailer, around Leadville.

Suddenly Bowie Ben spoke:

"I have the idea, and I'll explain it after we've put the strings on this fellow. I see some cords there."

At this Tobin seemed to realize that he had been rash, and he began to struggle furiously. He might as well have saved his efforts. His captors were old hands at the business, and he was soon bound, gagged and stuffed away in a closet off the office. It was necessary to hide him there for a time, in case some other person might enter the place. This done they resumed their places by the desk, and Turpin spoke quickly:

"You say you have a plan. If so, let me hear it at once."

"Do you remember Old Man Hicks, of Pony Fork?"

"Yes."

"He's just the man for a jailer."

"By Jupiter! you're right. I had entirely forgotten Hicks. He has helped us get a good deal of booty in the past, and I see no good reason why his faithfulness should end now. But how are we to get him there?"

"Give me two horses, and I'll see that he's there before morning."

"Good! It shall be so."

"The only trouble will be to get out of Leadville in safety."

"There will be a rub, I admit, but I think we can make the raffle. We must. We can't keep the fellow here."

"Not unless we get a barrel of whisky and keep him 'loaded,' and I have an idea that he could carry a pretty good 'jag,' anyhow. But I'll see him safely to Hicks, if you'll show us the way out of Leadville."

Night was approaching, and Dick began to plan for it at once. So far as horses were concerned, he could order them out freely at any time, but could not prevent people from spying on them if they saw fit. He remembered Jude Peterson with some uneasiness. This man he feared would yet cause him trouble.

It was arranged that Ben should retain his character of negro, and, after due arrangements had been made, he left the office.

Turpin had not seen the wounded sheriff since morning, and as he wanted to keep the run of his illness himself, he walked over to see how he was doing. The sheriff was a sick man. The doctors had decided that there was no fracture of his skull, but nothing human could save him from a siege of brain fever. He lay with closed eyes, bandaged, blistered, scorched and flushed with fever, muttering now and then, and moving restlessly, but not once speaking coherently. It might be weeks before he would; at the least, he was not expected to recover consciousness in less than two weeks.

Within that period Dick Turpin must run his career as Sheriff of Leadville. He could not hope for a longer reprieve, and the fact that there was a possibility that the sick man would recover his mental powers enough to reveal who he was any time, was enough to make all painfully uncertain.

He was, indeed, standing over a sleeping volcano.

If a premature eruption took place, he would be quite likely to be swung from the nearest tree, a victim of Judge Lynch, or an equally inexorable law.

Nevertheless, he had no intention of abandoning his daring deceit until his object was accomplished. Either he would save Raoul Legrand, or his own life should be given for his friend's.

His composure and natural bearing were wonderful under the circumstances. In all the place he had but one friend—Bowie Ben—but he was as cool as when his mountain band followed his lead, and men called him the Lion of Leadville.

In due time he returned to the office. He had locked the place, giving Ben one key, so he was not surprised when he found the door unlocked; but the sight of his ally there, minus his negro disguise, did surprise him. Ben's face was not as composed as usual, and he quickly exclaimed:

"The prisoner has escaped!"

"What?" cried Turpin, in dismay.

"When I got here the closet was empty. His bonds were lying on the floor, and I suppose he chafed them apart."

"How long have you been here?"

The Lion's voice had become cool, but he did not fail to comprehend the danger. Tobin had the power and will to ruin them.

"About five minutes; just long enough to wash off the black on my face. I thought that the best way."

"Have you any idea how long Tobin has been gone?"

"I suspect he had just left. I met a man near here as I came in, and noticed that he stopped and looked after me."

"Well, our jig is up, unless we can stop him. Now, where would he naturally go? Of course he would want to make immediate charges against me, and my only superior in the city is—"

At this moment the speaker's roving glance caught sight of a sheet of paper pinned to the wall. He advanced and tore it down. Holding it near the light, he read the following words:

"BOGUS SHERIFF BRADSTREET:—

"Your jig is up, I am free, and the mayor shall

know who and what you are as soon as I can reach him. Road-agents can't rule Leadville.

"Affectionately yours,
"TOBIN."

Turpin tore the paper into fragments.

"Just as I thought," he commented. "He has gone to the mayor, the only proper person to whom he could appeal."

"Then the quicker we get out of Leadville, the better."

"Not so," coolly replied the captain. "I happen to know more about the mayor than this man does. He supposes that official to be at home; but when he gets there, he will find that he is two miles out of town, at a party given by Colonel Casper. We will go direct to Casper's and head him off. I remember meeting a carriage as I was coming here, and from appearances, I'll wager something that Tobin was in it. Arm yourself well, Ben; there is all you need in the drawer of the desk; and we will get away at once. We must have a carriage, and give the fellow style for style."

The Lion's voice was clear and ringing, and Bowie Ben gave the unquestioning obedience he had always shown.

In a short time they were ready for the road.

Leaving the office, a carriage was readily found, and Turpin would have hired that particular one if it had cost fifty dollars. He recognized the driver as a man he knew he could depend upon, and when he placed three times the amount of money asked in Jehu's hand, he knew they would have a bold and faithful ally.

No time was lost on the way and, ignoring the mayor's house entirely, they left the city and took the road to Colonel Casper's. For half a mile after leaving the city they went briskly, and then reached the junction of roads where Tobin's carriage would be most likely to strike their track if, finding the mayor away, he should hasten to Casper's.

The question now became, had he passed that point?

This did not seem at all likely, but Dick Turpin sprung out with the lantern he had brought for that purpose and examined the ground.

What he saw did not please him.

A carriage had recently passed over the branch road, and turned toward the colonel's residence.

There was a possibility that this was not the one they sought, but the chances were against them. By furious driving the fellow might have made the junction ahead of them, and Dick could well believe there would be furious driving. Tobin had boldly announced his purpose, and it would not do to let any time go to waste. The road-agent sprung back to his own carriage.

"Five dollars extra, if you overtake that outfit before we reach Casper's," he tersely said, to his driver.

"I'll do it, or bust my cylinder-head a-trying," was the prompt reply.

There was a crack of his whip, and the horses shot away as though it was a race against time.

"I'm afraid it's a tough chance," said Bowie Ben.

"It's none too promising, but there are some things in our favor. The other party has done some mighty hard driving, and their horses must be anything but fresh, while ours are in the best of condition. That is an important point; and I see that we have good horse-flesh with us."

"Suppose Tobin does get there first?"

"I've thought of all that," coolly replied Turpin. "If that occurs, we must hazard all on the cast of a die. I have said that I *think* Tobin is one of Bradstreet's minor men. If so, and he is known to the mayor, our jig is, indeed, up; but the chances are that he will prove a stranger to the mayor."

"In that case, what?"

"In that case," evenly replied the Lion of Leadville, "you are a gentleman from Kansas; an officer of an insane asylum; and Tobin is an escaped prisoner. You have followed him here, and, as he is a very dangerous fellow, you have secured my help to catch him. Do you see?"

"By Jove! I do," Ben replied, "and there is lots of 'meat' in the scheme. You and I know that bold schemes are what succeed."

The driver was doing his duty well. He had good horses, and knew how to handle them, and they were sweeping along the road at a rate of speed which made the carriage dance like a thing of life. The wheels spun around dizzily, and when they struck an occasional stone by the way, left the ground and whirled in the air.

It brought the old road days vividly back to Dick Turpin, but he was no longer working with an object of which he need be ashamed. His usurpation of Rob Bradstreet's identity, and all the accompanying circumstances, was but so much done to win Lois, free her father, and win for himself a chance to live an honest life.

"I see them!" suddenly announced the driver.

"Where?"

"Dead ahead."

"So do I," Dick added. "Yes, the carriage is in sight, and the question now arises—can we overtake it before Casper's is reached? It's a

close rub. Lay on the whip, driver, or all this labor is lost."

The whip was "laid on," and they thundered forward at a mad pace. Objects by the wayside seemed like ghosts flitting along on silent wings. Almost at every revolution the wheels struck fire, and the horses' feet sung an accompaniment to the racket.

They were gaining, but not half fast enough for safety. The other carriage was at full speed, and the lights of Casper's house shone not far ahead. If Tobin reached there first, there was no knowing what mischief he might do!

Five minutes passed. They were still gaining, but the advantage was all with the pursued.

"The game is up!" said Dick Turpin, between his teeth. "Nothing but death can prevent him from beating us now!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH-SHOT IN THE DARK.

THIS assertion was beyond dispute. The leading carriage, dimly seen in the starlight, seemed certain to reach the colonel's house at least two minutes ahead of them, and a man with as much on his mind as Tobin had can say a good deal in two minutes. In this case it might be enough to hang one of the pursuers.

Bold Dick Turpin never faltered, however.

Many a time he had won victory where defeat seemed certain, simply by the use of that bold audacity which was a natural part of his nature.

Unless luck had wholly deserted him, it might be so now.

The Casper house was ablaze with lights, and all went to show that gayety reigned there supreme, as the leading carriage drew up at the door. A man sprung out and ran up the steps.

Dick Turpin rose and stood erect as his own vehicle thundered along the intervening space. His jaws were set, and his whole expression told of determination which no obstacle could daunt. His future, and that of Lois, might depend on the next few minutes, but no cause ever had a better champion.

The house was reached, and the driver reined in his panting horses; but, before they had stopped, Dick sprung out and ran up the steps.

He had expected to find Tobin already in the house, but, to his great relief, the fellow had not succeeded in passing the door. He stood there facing white-haired Colonel Casper and several servants, excitedly swinging his hands.

"But I tell you the mayor is not here," Casper exclaimed, as the Lion of Leadville ran up the steps.

"It's a lie!" shouted Tobin. "I know he is here, and I must see him at once. A minute more, and it may be too late."

A gleam of satisfaction shot into Dick Turpin's eyes. These few words were enough to show him that the man had not succeeded in telling his story to the mayor, whatever he might have done to others, and he was ready for a bold move.

His hand fell on Tobin's shoulder.

"It's too late now, my man!" he grimly said.

"Your game is up, and—"

Tobin had wheeled at the touch. His pursuer had arrived sooner than he expected, taking him somewhat by surprise, but, as he saw him, he suddenly jerked out a revolver and tried to use it. Dick, however, struck his arm, sending the weapon flying away.

"No, you don't! Now, be quiet, or it'll be the worse for you."

The warning was not heeded. Tobin was excited past all bounds of reason, and he began a furious struggle. It was short, however, for Bowie Ben came to his leader's aid and the irons they had brought were soon on the man's wrists.

Dick lifted his hat to the amazed old gentleman.

"I congratulate you on your escape, Colonel Casper. This man is one of the most dangerous lunatics I ever saw, or heard of."

"And I thank you, Sheriff Bradstreet, for helping me recapture him," put in Bowie Ben, glibly.

"He is not Sheriff Bradstreet!" almost howled Tobin. "Is there no one here who will listen to the truth? This man is Dick Turpin, the road-agent!"

The counterfeit sheriff broke into a light laugh, and then suddenly became grave.

"Poor fellow!" he said, "it is strange what fancies a madman will get. I hope he has not troubled you, colonel."

"Not to any great extent, sheriff; thank you. He came and demanded to see the mayor—who went away an hour ago—but his manner was so wild that the servants would not admit him. I had just come to see if I could quell the disturbance when you so luckily arrived."

Tobin saw that everything was going against him, and, unluckily for him, he was unable to urge his point calmly. His appearance was certainly excited enough for one deranged, as he cried:

"Are you blind? Look at that man! He is no more Sheriff Bradstreet than I am. He is Dick Turpin, the outlaw, and I can prove it if—"

"Sheriff, you had better take him away at once," interrupted the colonel. "He will dis-

turb my guests, and spoil their evening. I trust you will not let him escape again."

"Rest assured, we shall not. Mr. Hammond, here, who belongs to the asylum, will take him away at once. Have no further fear, colonel."

This polite talk nearly drove Tobin as insane as he was alleged to be, and he fought desperately against being removed, but Dick and Ben lifted him bodily and carried him to their carriage. He was thrust inside, a few words said at parting, and then the driver turned his horses and they moved away.

"So far, so good," observed Dick.

"By George! it was very good. You never carried out a job with more nerve. If you had been Governor of the State you could not have carried a bolder hand."

"Timidity never wins. By the way, Mr. Tobin, you are suddenly silent. Have you nothing to say?"

"No," sullenly answered the prisoner.

"You may talk now, if you wish."

"I don't, but you must bear one thing in mind, Dick Turpin. It's a long road that has no turning, and I will live to bring you to grief. I swear it!"

"Pardon me, but how do you know you are destined to live at all? What is to hinder our leaving you in a grave, here in the mountains?"

"Perhaps it would be just as well," sulkily replied the prisoner.

"I am more than half-inclined to believe you, but I am no assassin, and, if you are sensible, you may yet live to be a patriarch. Understand me, though—I am not going to have any more nonsense from you. I am playing for too high stakes to be blocked by you. If you get in my way again—if you do, I say—I'll be as merciless as you have shown yourself. Bear this in mind and—beware!"

The return to Leadville was made without further adventure. Just outside Ben and the prisoner were dropped, and then Dick went on to get three saddle-horses. One which he took was his own noble black, which he had ridden when "on the road." It seemed quite natural that the victor should appropriate the spoils, and no one wondered when the supposed sheriff announced that he should keep the road-agent's horse.

With Brutus and the other horses, Dick turned back and rejoined Bowie Ben.

Then all rode away from the vicinity.

According to previous arrangement, Ben was to take the prisoner to Pony Fork, and lodge him with Old Man Hicks, but Dick thought it prudent to see him well on his way.

They rode together for three miles, and then a brief good-by was said and the captain turned back.

He rode homeward in a thoughtful mood. Tobin had, by rare good luck, been safely disposed of, but it would be a miracle if other complications did not arise. He had placed himself in a situation where nearly all the chances seemed against him; on one side were his resemblance to Bradstreet, and his nerve and fertility of resource, but on the other trooped a legion of reasons why his position might be called precarious.

Thinking of all this, and studying the situation, he rode back in a condition which permitted him to notice but little by the way. Something occurred to arouse him, however, before Leadville was reached.

He was moving quietly through a dark gulch, with Brutus choosing his own pace, when the darkness just ahead of him was suddenly, but transiently, broken by a vivid flash of light; the well-known whistle of a bullet sounded near his head; and the report of a revolver followed as a fitting climax.

Instantly, Dick Turpin was the Lion of Leadville again. Some one had tried to shoot him down without warning, and the cowardly act fired his blood to a belligerent pitch.

With a sharp cry to Brutus, he dashed toward the unknown.

Crack!

Again the revolver sounded, but the shot was wider sped than the first. Then he saw a dark figure speeding away, and a grim smile crossed his face as he saw how the black horse was covering ground in pursuit. He had drawn a revolver, himself, but neither made a motion to use it nor call to the fugitive.

The latter ran a few yards and then looked over his shoulder. He seemed to realize the folly of flight, and then prepared for another shot. He cocked his revolver, but, as he tried to turn, his foot caught on a stone and he fell in a heap.

Then came a third report, a sharp cry and a groan.

Dick Turpin had with difficulty avoided running upon the fallen man, and as he reined in his horse he knew that the unknown had shot himself, or was laying a trap into which he might walk.

Disregarding the latter possibility, he sprung to the ground and approached the spot. The unknown moaned feebly.

"What's the trouble?" Dick asked, watching him warily.

"I'm a dead man!"

"Not so bad as that, I reckon. Let me see."

"Let me alone!" was the faint reply. "The

bullet has gone through my vitals. I won't have any one poking me over, and it's just as well. I die as the fool dieth!"

"How would it have been if you had killed me?"

"I did it for money. What won't a man do for money, after he's lost his soul? I'm a miserable wretch, and it's well for the world that I'm taken off, but who would have suspected this in the old days when I was—what I was!"

Turpin no longer had a doubt as to the man's condition. There was blood on his hands where he had touched his arm, and only a consummate actor could have counterfeited those signs which told of approaching dissolution.

"You say you did it for money. Are you a road-agent?"

"If I ever have been, it was not as that that I came here. I was hired to kill you!"

The Lion started.

"Hired to kill me! By whom?"

"I don't know his name, but I met him in the city."

"Haven't you got the wrong man? Who do you take me to be?"

"I don't know. He showed you to me when you rode away with the horses, and said you would ride back this way on one. I marked you well then, and I have made no mistake. You ride a black horse with a thread of white in his forehead. You're the man!"

Dick thought of Duke Hallock, and tersely said:

"Describe him!"

"He was an old man, thin but erect, with long, spare hair. His eyes were keen, and from the corner of the left one reaches a V-shaped scar, bottom side up."

There was a period of silence, but had Dick Turpin been an emotional man he would have cried out in astonishment. Imperfect as the description was, he believed that it would apply to but one man in the world; and that one had once been well known to him—more, he had since traveled thousands of miles in a vain attempt to find him. That he should hear from him in this way was astonishing, though his desperate enmity was no new discovery.

"This man!" the Lion finally cried. "What is his present name? Where does he live? Where can I find him?"

"What?" feebly asked the dying man.

"I say, where can I find this man?"

"What man?"

"He who hired you to shoot me. Speak quickly, or it may be too late!"

"Too late! Yes, it is too late. The sands of life are run out. Oh! this is death! My blood is cold, and my soul slipping away from my grasp. It's going into the dark!"

And then, with a start and shiver, the unknown lay a dead weight in Dick's hands. Life and breath had gone forever "into the dark!"

CHAPTER XIII.

JUDGE LYNCH, OF LEADVILLE.

FOR several seconds Dick Turpin remained motionless beside the dead man, whose breath had gone all too quick. He did not believe that he could have told much more than he did, but, possibly some points might have been gathered from him which would have led to the discovery of the Man with the Scar.

The Man with the Scar! That was the name by which Dick Turpin knew him. More than twenty years had passed since, to his knowledge, he first saw that man, and, since then, the man had often crossed his path. Often, but irregularly, he had reappeared, and he always had cards about him with a name upon them.

The same name never appeared twice. If he was Edward Gray on one occasion, he might be Thomas Raymond the next, and so on. He was a man of countless names, yet a man who had no name. And so, for years, Dick had thought of him by the title he had instinctively given him:

The Man with the Scar!

He had been the curse of Dick Turpin's life. But for him the Lion of Leadville would never have been heard of; but for him Dick Turpin would never have crossed the Father of Waters. Through his means the road-agent had become what he was. To avoid him, he had fled hundreds of miles; to find him, he had traveled thousands. And when, after long years, he had decided that he should never see him again, he heard of him in a way more startling, if not as mysterious, as what had gone before.

Minutes passed before the road-agent stirred, but he finally became conscious that the passage of time was momentarily bringing day nearer, so he aroused and bore the body to a niche in the canyon.

Before he went away he searched the pockets of the dead man's various garments, but found nothing of importance. So far as he could tell, there was nothing to reveal his identity.

Brutus was impatiently pawing the ground, and, when given the word, galloped away rapidly. He went with loose rein; his master's thoughts were elsewhere.

Now, if not before, he realized what a whirlpool of danger Leadville was for him. Now that he knew who had been at the bottom of the at-

tempted assassination, he no longer asked himself if the assassin had found the right man.

Not only was he ready to believe it, but the event revealed the fact that, to one man, at least, his identity was known. The Man with the Scar was not deceived by his flimsy device! Worse than that, if his mysterious enemy had resolved to remove him by violence, would he not speedily reveal the whole truth to the people of Leadville?

No more deadly blow could be inflicted.

"Death and danger lurks at my every foot-step," the road-agent muttered; "but even that shall not make me turn back. I will stick to my assumed identity until Lois is able to travel, and her father can be released. Visible and invisible dangers shall not turn me back, and I will fight the Man with the Scar as I fight more manly foes. Death will be at my side night and day, but I am still the Lion of Leadville!"

He spoke the words with erect head and flashing eyes, his hand on his revolver and his keen gaze darting into the darkness which lay on either side his course.

An enemy would have fared badly if he had appeared then, but none came, and the rider reached Leadville without further adventure.

The night was not destined to pass without further excitement, however.

Late as it was when he reached the city, there was an unusual number of men abroad. He noticed them as he rode toward where Brutus was stabled, and could not but notice the fact that all were going the same way. This seemed odd, and, in looking closer, he noticed that one of them wore a mask. He looked at the others. It was the same with them. This was a peculiar fact for which he could not account, but he was not a particularly jealous officer, and he disregarded the fact and went on to stable Brutus.

Having done this he started away on foot. No more masked men were to be seen, but they hovered persistently in his mind.

He stopped and looked around, beset by a feeling of uneasiness for which he could not account.

Then he suddenly started. A suspicion had entered his mind which alarmed him. Wheeling, he started away at a run. In trying to account for the movements of the masked men, all going toward one point, he had suddenly remembered Raoul Legrand and the whispers of the people in regard to lynching.

No wonder he was alarmed.

Straight toward the jail he ran, and, as he neared it, saw his worst fear confirmed. A crowd was collected around the building, and from it rose a murmur, subdued, yet threatening and angry.

At that moment, too, he saw that a struggle was going on in the lighted entrance to the jail, and it needed no very keen eyes to see that some one was being taken out. There was a stout resistance, but, as Dick sped onward, the whole mass surged forward outside the door, and a louder murmur arose from the crowd.

"Hang him! hang him!"

The words were not loudly spoken, but they reached Turpin's ears. He believed, too, that he recognized Legrand as the object of their wrath.

The crowd surged to one side, and Dick saw that, at that point, a timber had been run out of an open window.

Some one tossed the coils of a rope high in the air.

There was no longer any doubt as to the mob's purpose.

Dick Turpin was running at full speed, but, to him, his feet seemed weighted with lead. The masked men were also making haste. One end of the rope was thrown over the timber, and a dozen hands tried at once to cast the noose over the prisoner's head. Turpin drew his revolver and began firing in the air.

He hoped the report would alarm the lynchers, but it only stung them to fury.

"Up with him!" cried a hoarse voice. "The cops are onto us, but we have the lead. Form solid columns, and don't let nobody through till justice is satisfied!"

"Death to whoever interferes!"

"Up with him!"

"Down with the police!"

It was not the kind of crowd a common man would have been willing to meddle with, but Dick Turpin was a stranger to fear. He was one man against two-score, but he did not hesitate. He went on, and none too soon. Just as he reached the outskirts of the crowd there was a strong pull from many hands and Raoul Legrand dangled in the air.

Quickly the Leadville Lion acted.

Seeing that the rope was a slender one, he raised his revolver and, aiming by the lamp-light, sent a bullet tearing through its strands.

Then he flung himself headlong against the crowd.

One quick glance sufficed to show him that his bullet had done good work; the weakened rope had parted and allowed the miner to drop; but, after that, he was too busy to look. Angry men opposed his progress, and, regardless of his announcement that he was Bradstreet, tried to beat him down.

It was then that he proved his right to be call-

ed the Lion of Leadville. Brawny miners who had been in scores of fights said, afterward, that they had never seen such fighting as that. It was one man against two-score, but the one seemed to bear a charmed life, and to have the fighting ability of all the others, combined.

Many hands were raised to strike him, but he received no heavy blow. Step by step he forced his way among them, his iron fists always busy, and when he struck a man was sure to drop as far as the pressure of the crowd would permit.

It was like a cyclone in the timber, and, just as the rope was rearranged and the ringleaders were about to pull again, Dick Turpin burst through the line, tore the noose from Legrand's neck, and faced the crowd.

In each hand he held a revolver, and the lynchers afterward declared that sparks of fire flashed from his eyes—a remark which may well be taken figuratively, if not literally.

Loud and clear his voice arose:

"In the name of law, I call upon you to disperse! I am Sheriff Bradstreet, and I will shoot the first man who tries to lay hand on me or Legrand!"

A hush fell upon the mob. There was something about this daring stand, and the air of the man, which quelled their turbulent spirits as water conquers fire.

Confused and uncertain, they stood in momentary stupefaction, and then several of the jail employees crept to Dick Turpin's side. There was a sheepishness in their manner which the Leadville Lion quickly noted, but they took their stand by him with ready revolvers.

"Who will be shot first?" Turpin added fiercely.

A murmur ran through the crowd, and those at the outskirts began to sneak away. The alarm spread—became a panic—and like a flock of sheep, the once-bold lynchers started to flee. Dick sprung forward and seized two of the ringleaders, holding them despite all their struggles, and then the others bounded away.

The "sheriff's" orders were few and to the point, and in a very brief space of time, Legrand was returned to his cell, and two others found for the occupancy of the captured lynchers.

He then questioned the guards as to the beginning of the affair, and learned that a forced note, purporting to come from him, had taken the extra force away; while the regular men claimed that they had fought desperately until overpowered, and then, by means of great efforts, had made their escape just in time to figure at the crisis.

Dick Turpin suspected that these precious fellows had been in collusion with the lynchers, but he said nothing to that effect then. He did, however, promptly announce that he should spend the remainder of the night in the jail himself.

He sat down at one side and leaned his head upon his hand. He was no longer in a gladiator-like mood, and something like despair assailed him. Even the men who should be faithful to the Sheriff of Leadville, failed him. How could he hope to continue his battle successfully against a whole city?

Suddenly a penetrating whisper broke in on his meditations:

"Is the Lion of Leadville shorn of his claws?"

The road-agent bounded to his feet. Who knew him so well? He looked, and then grew amazed. *The Man with the Scar stood before him!*

CHAPTER XIV.

RED KIT'S WARNING.

DICK TURPIN sprung to his feet, his hand falling on his revolver, but the Man with the Scar moved as quickly as he. A sneering smile swept over the wrinkled, sinister face, and the man receded through an open door, which then slammed to with a bang.

The road-agent laid hold of the knob, but it resisted for a moment. He gave a jerk and the way was clear, but the hall outside was vacant.

The Man with the Scar had disappeared!

Dick ran to the outer door and looked up and down the street. The gray, gloomy hour of daybreak was at hand, and he could see distinctly, but there was no sign of the man he sought. In fact, not a person was visible on the street.

He turned back and made a thorough search of the premises, but without result. The Man with the Scar had gone. There was nothing mysterious about his way of departure; Dick clearly saw that he had passed out of a window at one side, and thus made good his escape; but it again showed the cunning of the man.

He seemed capable of going and coming wherever he saw fit.

Satisfied that he had gone for the time, Dick again sat down and gave himself up to thought. The appearance of this man put a new aspect on the case. However his disguise might deceive the people of Leadville, it did not in the least deceive the Man with the Scar. His terse, sneering whisper—"Is the Lion of Leadville shorn of his claws?"—clearly revealed that the speaker had no doubt as to the usurper's identity.

He knew the truth, and one word from him

would make all Leadville rise as one man and join in a howling mob to tear from his false position the dashing outlaw who had ruled the road in the days of the band.

"If they get the hint," he thought, "no one man can save me as I saved Legrand. I should be hanged without the shadow of a trial. Nothing can convince the people that I am working honorably now. Will that word be spoken? The Man with the Scar was never my friend, and the attempt to assassinate me in the past recalls what he once said to me when I was a child of five years: 'I may some time have to kill you, my pretty boy!' He has tried it once, and if he does not set the men of Leadville upon me, it will be because he has schemes of his own to work. Men call me Sheriff of Leadville to-day, but never did sheriff stand in such imminent danger before. Known and unknown perils menace me; the palpable and the mystic alike surround me. Yet I will go on to triumph or death!"

He firmly closed his teeth; the Lion of Leadville might be threatened, but he was not daunted.

Shortly after he investigated the lynchers' attack, and satisfied that the employees at the jail had helped rather than hindered the mob, he discharged every man.

New attendants were appointed, and the extra guard of officers ordered not to desert their posts under any condition, unless personally ordered by him.

The captured lynchers were notified that they would have prompt trial and punishment, and, moreover, the "sheriff" posted a notice warning the escaped adherents of Judge Lynch that rifles had been stored in the jail, and that, if another attack was made, the defenders had orders to kill every rioter they could.

Nobody was surprised at this, for the real Bradstreet had been a man of force and resolution; but the order led the people to name the sheriff anew: "The Man with the Iron Hand."

When such a course seemed safe, Dick flung himself upon a bed, still dressed, and slept soundly for some hours. When he awoke, Bowie Ben, once more disguised as a negro, was waiting to see him. The subordinate had seen Sam Tobin housed at Old Man Hicks's, and then returned to Leadville.

Dick promptly installed him as chief nurse of the sick sheriff, *alias* the road-agent. The man who already held that position remonstrated, but he was well paid and peremptorily dismissed. Now that the die was fully cast, Dick Turpin did not hesitate. He trod the streets as though all Leadville was his, and all matters were handled with ungloved hands.

If he came to grief in the midst of his career, it was not likely that people ever would forget how the Lion of Leadville had ruled them.

Reports from Lois Legrand were not favorable. She was conscious, but very weak, and it would be some days before she could bear a long journey. Until she was better, Dick must either hold his perilous position or abandon Raoul Legrand to his fate.

Shortly before noon Dick went to the sheriff's office, where, to his surprise and annoyance, he found Red Kit awaiting him. The girl had grown extremely obnoxious, to express it mildly, to him. In his opinion her crime had been a most villainous one, and only her sex saved her from punishment; but, mixed with the loathing, there was the recollection of the old days when she was like sunshine in the cave, and the fact that she had done all this because she loved him!

These items were influential enough so that he could not drive her from the office, but his gaze was anything but friendly.

Red Kit had improved in looks. The color had come back to her face in a great measure, and some of her old life and activity mingled with her gravity.

"I suppose you're surprised to see me," she said, abruptly.

"I am, considering what I said before."

"But I've not come to speak of Dick Turpin."

"Indeed! What then?"

"Do you know a lady named Sibylla Marcy?"

Turpin started.

"Rather. Yes, I do."

"She has two children?"

"Yes."

Dick looked abruptly at Red Kit. Did she know that Sibylla claimed to be his wife?

"They are in danger."

"From what?—from whom?"

"That I don't know."

"You are talking in riddles," brusquely observed the counterfeit sheriff. "Are you trying to work up a boom for yourself, by posing as their friend?"

"If I was, I should want a better helper than you!"

The retort was made in Red Kit's old style, but she immediately grew grave.

"Excuse me; I did not mean to speak thus. Hear me, Mr. Bradstreet, and you will accuse me of no double dealing."

"Sit down, Miss Hallock, and talk freely."

Dick felt lighter-hearted than he had done for some time. His success in hiding his identity from the mountain girl led him to believe that all others, who had no cause for suspicion,

might be equally blind. True, he was disguised by the bandage over his face, and the loss of his mustache, while he took great care to disguise his voice; but the eyes of love are said to be sharp, and Red Kit was not one easy to deceive.

She obeyed his last direction and came to business at once:

"I am now living in Leadville. My mother and I came here, went to a quiet house and resolved to live such secluded lives that no one could find us. The few survivors of the band had disappeared; Lasso Lije and Revolver Rube went openly, to seek other scenes of adventure; Bowie Ben mysteriously disappeared; and my father, almost a monomaniac in his desire to find and punish Dick Turpin for what father will term his treachery, wandered away. Mother and I were alone, so we came here."

"As I have said, the house was a quiet one—I suspect that all the lodgers keep very close; in fact, are in hiding for one reason or another—but we at once discovered that we had a neighbor on one side who was a woman, and that the walk between the two rooms were thin."

"Late last night this woman had a visitor—a man. At first we took but little notice what they said, but she talked loudly, passionately, and some words which we caught led us to listen. She was cursing you deeply and loudly, but the man interrupted her."

"Enough of this," he said; "you will alarm the whole house if you make so much noise. Let us change the subject. I have investigated the woman and children at the hotel."

"Ha!" she exclaimed, "what have you learned?"

"I believe the woman is Bradstreet's wife!"

"Upon that she swore roundly; as much so as any member of our old band ever did in my hearing; and wound up by vowing that she would go to the hotel and kill them."

"No, you won't," the man answered. "Such a move would be a fatal blunder, and would ruin all our hopes, for you would probably be detected and arrested. I have a plan worth a dozen of that. The woman and her children must be kidnapped. We will secure them, take them to a safe place and secrete them, and then we will have Rob Bradstreet's heart in our grasp, to bend and break as we see fit."

"The woman readily agreed to this plan, and he promised to attend to it at once. That's what I heard, and I've come to tell you."

"Did you hear the names of the persons talking?" Dick asked.

"His was Jude; hers, Meg."

"Just so! I suspected as much, and I will see that their little game don't work. Thank you for telling me, Miss Hallock."

Red Kit opened her lips as though to speak, but closed them again and abruptly arose.

"I'll go now," she said.

Dick delayed her while he asked some further questions, and then she left the office and glided quietly down the street, her face concealed from casual view by a veil. Turpin looked after her thoughtfully, wondering at the change which a few days had made in her appearance, but he had other matters to attend to, and he suddenly aroused.

"So Jude Peterson proposes to remove Sibylla and her children! He suspects the truth, and I thought he would. I wish it was in my power to wind up that unconscionable villain at once; but Bradstreet made a pet of him, and I must use him well during my brief term of office, or he may tell that which will do harm. I can easily foil his intentions in regard to Sibylla by having her change her quarters, and it shall be done at once. If, as she asserts, she is Robert Bradstreet's wife, I must care for her as earnestly as though I were a real sheriff. If Rob recovers, and ever learns the truth about me, he shall not accuse me of having been untrue to him and his interests."

Arrangements were soon made for Sibylla and her children to go to a private house where he believed they would be safe, and he then went to the hotel to notify her of the desired change.

It became necessary for him to invent some fiction. He would not tell her the truth concerning Jude Peterson, for it would unnecessarily alarm her; so he merely said that men who were trying to get his office from him were looking for a chance to do him harm, and that she must remain in hiding for awhile.

Sibylla was of an obedient nature, and inclined to do whatever he thought best, but she did hold out for an acknowledgment on his part that she was his wife.

Considerable tact now became necessary, but Turpin performed his part so well that, though plainly not satisfied, she yielded to his plan. She would go into positive retirement with her children, trusting to him to duly recognize her in the end.

The Leadville Lion left the house considerably relieved, but he would have been less pleased had he seen who shortly followed him out. This was Jude Peterson, his small, evil eyes filled with an unusual glow, and he hastened at once to Meg's room in the house where she was in hiding.

"The time has come!" was his abrupt salutation. "Sheriff Bradstreet must be immediately attacked; we must strike without delay!"

CHAPTER XV.

HOW DICK TURPIN MET THE DANGER.

MEG sprung to her feet. A fiercer gleam shone from her eyes, and a greedy look was on her passionate face.

"At last!" she exclaimed. "At last, and never was a prisoner more overjoyed with a reprieve. This waiting, waiting process has sapped my life day by day. It was as though a vulture was tearing with his beak at my heart. But what has happened?"

Jude Peterson had waited impatiently for her to finish.

"The long and short of it is that I have discovered that he is about to remove her from the hotel to some other place; I didn't learn where. Neither do I know his object, though I suspect that he don't admire the woman, and wants to get rid of her. The excuse he gave I know to be a lie."

"Well, if he hates her, perhaps we need not molest her."

"Wait, wait! She may be unloved, but if she is his legal wife—"

"I see; I see! Nothing but her death will make me safe."

Meg spoke fiercely, and her features worked as though the figurative vulture was, really, tearing at her heart.

"But, to resume," added Jude. "I saw Bradstreet going to the hotel, followed secretly, listened at a transom and overheard all, and then I saw that there must be no more delay. You must strike!"

"I am ready."

"For myself, I must remain out of the game. That stupid fool of a sheriff does not suspect who I am, and I can harm him more as his pretended friend than as an open enemy. The distinct work you must do yourself, and now I want you to go direct to the mayor, tell your story and have Bradstreet arrested."

Meg caught up her outer garments.

"I am ready!" she tersely said.

"Mind, now, that you remember all my minute directions, and—wait a second! Say to the mayor that you think Bradstreet is about to flee the city, and that proceedings must be begun at once."

"I'll remember."

She would have gone on foot, fierce as a bloodhound on the trail, but Jude ordered a carriage in which she would be concealed from public view, and go with a degree of respectability outwardly.

When this was done Jude went to the sheriff's office, and, for several hours, made himself busy there. He had never seemed a more valuable assistant. He entered into all of his superior's plans with zeal, and threw in a good deal of judicious flattery which would probably have pleased the genuine sheriff.

Dick Turpin, however, knowing the accomplished scoundrel as he did, felt a strong desire to set upon him boot and fist, and give him a thrashing he would not soon forget. No shadow of this desire was on his face, however, and he gave Jude no cause for suspicion.

Another twilight came, and darkness followed. There yet remained some hours before the time appointed for calling again on Sibylla, and, after making a visit to the jail and hospital, to inquire concerning Legrand and Bradstreet respectively, the impersonator of the latter sat down in the office alone. Jude had gone on an errand devised by himself, and Dick had the scene to himself.

An hour passed, and then the door opened and several persons entered. First came the mayor; then Meg, and, at the rear, two officers.

The men Dick was not sorry to see, but, at sight of Meg, he did not need the troubled look on the mayor's face to reveal the truth. He realized at a breath that a trap had been sprung upon him, but not by as much as the quivering of a muscle did he show alarm or embarrassment.

Rising, he gave his hand to the mayor.

"Good-evening, sir; glad to see you. I was having a solitary smoke, and shall be delighted to have you join me—if the lady does not object."

He made a courteous gesture toward Meg, who seemed dumfounded by his cool self-possession.

"Thank you," the mayor answered, hesitatingly, "but the fact—a—that is—we have come on business."

"Glad to hear it," airily replied the Lion of Leadville. "Business has become confounded lax and coquettish of late—a regular will-o'-the-wisp. Nothing more stirring than a few lynching-bees, and the massacre of a tribe or two of road-agents. But why don't you explain, Mr. Mayor? You force me to do all the talking!"

Considering that Dick gave nobody else chance to put in a word, this was further evidence of his will, if not ability, to run matters. But the mayor gravely replied:

"I wish I might allow you to do all the talking, but I have an official duty to perform. We have come to arrest you, sheriff!"

Dick Turpin laughed lightly.

"What's the offense?—petty larceny, or libel?"

"I wish it was nothing worse. That is to say—well, here's a lady—who claims that you are her husband."

"The dickens she does!" coolly replied Turpin. "Is she a Mormon, and have I been 'sealed' to her? I certainly have no recollection of a ceremony."

"It is as false as—"

Thus far Meg spoke explosively, but the mayor put out his hand authoritatively.

"You promised me you would use no intemperate language," he said, sternly.

"Do you expect me to stand here like a mummy while he tells his lies with the nonchalance of a born comedian?" she fiercely demanded.

"No; I must, and will, speak. He pretends not to know me, but your own face is less familiar to him than mine. We were children together; he, Robert Bradstreet, and I, Margaret Gregerson. Ask him if he was ever in Kentucky, near Black Run! Ask him if he did not then make me his wife!"

Dick Turpin was looking at her in what seemed to be the most genuine surprise.

"Mr. Mayor, is this woman insane?" he asked.

Meg stamped her foot furiously.

"It's not your fault that I am in my right mind. You have done enough to make me mad."

"By George! you get mad quickly, then; I never saw you until a few months ago."

"I will take charge here," said the mayor, commandingly. "Madam, if you want any help you must act more reasonably. Sheriff, I must ask you to hear her statement."

"Willingly, sir," was the prompt reply. "I am anxious to see if there is a grain of truth in it. Of course it is absurd for her to say she is my wife, but her story will settle whether we have ever met."

Meg's eyes were flashing, but she controlled herself by a strong effort, and accepted the chair offered her.

Then she began her story.

"My name is Margaret Gregerson, and I was born in Kentucky, at a place called Black Run. I do not hesitate to say that my family were of the class known as 'poor whites,' honest poverty is honorable, and my folks were as honest as living people could be."

Dick Turpin could hardly avoid a laugh. He knew her, and the whole tribe of Gregersons, of old. They were "poor whites," but their honesty—that quality was with them like perpetual motion; it was indiscoverable. In point of fact they had been robbers, horse-thieves, drunkards and knaves in general; and the majority of the tribe had been coarse and ignorant. Meg was intelligent, but, otherwise, she was a true "Gregerson of Black Run."

"Not far from us lived a rich man whose name was Bradstreet," the woman continued, "and between him and my family there was a bitter feud. My father asserted that the Bradstreets had robbed his family of land they justly owned; but that occurred before my day, and I have no definite knowledge on the subject. Let me speak of Robert Bradstreet—this man!"

Here she made an imperious gesture toward the self-styled sheriff.

"He was the son of our neighbor, and, when I was a ragged child, I remember seeing him, a fine young gentleman a year or two my senior, go galloping past on his fleet horse. He seemed to me like a prince, but I was ordered not to speak to him, and he did not notice me at all."

"After that he was away at school, and it was not until I was eighteen years old that we ever spoke to each other. Then, one day, I met him by chance in the road near our home. He looked surprised; why, I did not then know. Now I can surmise. People called me pretty then, like a wild Gypsy queen, and my face aroused his admiration. He spoke, I answered, and it was half an hour later when we parted."

"I went home in a tremor. I had talked with the son of our enemy, and I feared discovery. This did not happen, however, and I had a chance to think of him, dream of him—ay, for I, an ignorant country girl, had surrendered my heart at once. Say what you will; blame me, if you will; I could not help it!"

Her manner had grown dramatic, and her usual fierceness was just sufficiently curbed to make her manner impressive. But the mayor, keenly watching the supposed sheriff, saw only wonder on his face.

"Nothing had been said about another meeting," she resumed, "but another meeting took place. I believe he searched for me, and I know that I welcomed him gladly in my heart, if not openly. After we met often, and each occasion deepened my infatuation. He seemed as far above other people that I knew, as Heaven was above earth, and I grew to worship him."

"Unless he spoke falsely, he was not less affected. He soon declared his love, and, time and again, we met and had interviews which were to me like oases in a wide desert. It was a wonder that our secret meetings were never discovered, but they were not."

So far she had been telling the truth, as far as she knew, except as to the character of her family. All this Dick Turpin knew; he now listened closely to hear how she would manage the fictitious part of the narrative.

"Finally he spoke of marriage between us, but there was the fierce family quarrel. Either one of us, or both, was liable to be killed by an-

gry relatives when the truth was known, and it was plain that we must not marry and live where they could find us. What was to be done?"

"I was filled with terror, but Robert proposed that we quietly leave the place, go West, meet in Denver and be married. I obeyed his request. On my part I literally 'ran away,' leaving no trace behind me, but I know now that he told his father he was going to investigate a business chance, and went openly."

"We met in Denver, and were there married. It was no secret ceremony but one performed in church, as I can easily prove. I can produce all the records and the minister."

Here she looked defiantly at Dick.

"What about the groom?" he asked, in a low voice, and then added: "Go on!"

"We were married, and then settled down in Denver, living something quietly, but by no means in concealment. For three months I was as happy as though my paradise had been a permanent one, and he was all that I could desire. Then, one morning, he was missing. I was alarmed, and caused search to be made for him. I thought then, poor fool, that he had fallen into the hands of some of the city ruffians."

"My agents, however, traced him to the railroad station, and it was found that he had taken a train for the East, alive and well. Then came a letter from St. Louis which told the whole terrible truth. He had tired of me; I was deserted, and left almost penniless."

"What followed I need not tell in detail, for it would be but a record of my long, heart-broken search for him. I searched, never in a spirit of revenge, for I had not given up hopes of winning him back, but eagerly, prayerfully. I have found him at last, living here under his true name."

The mayor turned to the supposed sheriff.

"What have you to say to this, Mr. Bradstreet?"

Dick Turpin nonchalantly knocked the ash from his cigar.

"Simply that, judging by her rare gift of fiction, I think that this lady is the daughter of the original Munchausen!"

CHAPTER XVI.

JUDE IMPROVES HIS CHANCE.

THE Lion of Leadville spoke with the utmost coolness. If he had been discussing the quality of the cigar he so placidly smoked, he could not have been more at his ease outwardly.

The mayor looked puzzled, while Meg fiercely exclaimed:

"Dare you deny my statement?"

"Most certainly I do. Such a string of fictions was never before put together in real life—if I am the man to whom they are applied. There may be other Robert Bradstreets, and you may be laboring under an honest delusion, but I am willing to take my oath that not only did I never marry you, but that not one word of your story is true as to myself. Whether I originated in Kentucky, Colorado, California or Labrador, is my affair and nobody's else; but I will swear that I never courted or married you!"

Meg's eyes were flashing again.

"It is false—false as perdition!" she cried.

"She has told a strong story," said the mayor, hesitatingly. "It sounds well on the surface."

"A good many fictions do."

"Villain!" Meg exclaimed; "you shall pay for these insults!"

She quickly drew a revolver and turned the muzzle upon Dick, but with a spring as light and easy as that of a panther he was at her side in an instant, and the dangerous weapon was snatched away. He passed it to the mayor with a bow.

"Pray take charge of this toy for a few minutes. I observe that there is a good deal of lead in it. Now, my friends, this matter may be settled in a very short time. Mr. Mayor, if you will step into the other office, post your men outside the door so that I cannot run away, and give me a private interview of five minutes with this lady, I'll wager something that all can be amicably settled."

Meg at first protested against this arrangement, but a hope that he might really be weakening, despite his bold exterior, led her to consent after some sparring at words.

They were accordingly left together.

"Meg," promptly said Turpin, as carelessly as before, "I am sorry to see you mix so much fiction with the truth which you told. I need not separate one from the other, for you can do that, but I do not want you to persist in your claim."

"Well, I shall persist, and produce necessary witnesses," she defiantly replied.

"Perjurers, you mean."

"Call them what you will."

"I suppose your object is revenge—or is it money?"

"Both."

"You are frank."

"We are now alone."

"Just so. Well, I'll be frank, too."

"Go on!"

"You must drop your claim."

"Never!"

"Oh! yes, you will, and this is why: Meg Gregerson, I know more about you than you do about me. Perhaps you remember how you one night tried to kill the hero and villain of the story you have lately told—Robert Bradstreet—myself. That, you know, was after the gay young Rob of that day—I am now getting old—had found out that you were a tiger-cat. This was the sequel to that love-affair, you know, instead of a bridal term in Denver."

"Come to the point! What have you to say?" she impatiently demanded.

"Only this: After you failed to commit murder, you fled from Black Run to California. There you married a man named Donaldson; an old man with some money. At the end of a year he died suddenly. You, as his widow, asked for his property. Unluckily, some miserable villain suggested that the dead man's stomach be analyzed. This was done, and quantities of arsenic found there. It was proved that you purchased the stuff; proved that you gave it to your husband with your own hands. A warrant was made out for your arrest, but it was never served. Why? Because the sheriff, taking a fancy to you, burned the warrant and eloped with you. You were not found by the officers of the law, but I tell you, Meg, that unless you let me wholly alone, and withdraw your complaint, I will send you back to California to be hung for your husband's murder!"

Commencing slowly, Dick Turpin's speech had become rapid and intense, and his gaze was a terrible one to the guilty woman.

She had gone through the varying shades of surprise, doubt, fear, dismay and utmost consternation, and at the close, cowed and appalled, her whole form shook as though with palsy.

It seemed to her that Dick Turpin's words were so many daggers driven to her heart, and that sparks of fire shot from his flashing eyes. There is nothing too impossible for fear to suggest.

At the last words she clasped her hands.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed. "Have pity on me, a miserable woman!"

"Had you any pity for me?"

"Oh! I was mad, mad!"

"Mad for revenge?" he dryly observed.

"Well, are you ready to withdraw your charge against me, and leave me forever alone if I will let you go free?"

"I will. I swear it!"

Turpin smiled grimly.

"Your oath is made of thinnest gloss; I rely more on what I shall hear you say to the mayor. May I call him out?"

"Yes."

"And you will retract?"

"I will."

"So be it then."

He dictated what he wished her to say, and then walked to the inner door and asked the mayor to step out. He came, looking sharply at the other two. Dick motioned to Meg with calm courtesy.

"Let her speak!" he said.

"I have made a mistake," said Meg, looking down, and nervously closing and unclosing her fingers. "I was sincere in what I said, but a similarity of names led me into error. I am satisfied that this gentleman is not my husband; that he is nothing to me; and I desire to withdraw my complaint against him."

The mayor looked greatly relieved.

"That settles it!" he announced. "I found it hard to believe anything against our worthy sheriff, and am glad to see him fully exonerated."

"Her mistake was quite excusable. Why, I even look like the Robert Bradstreet she knew," blandly added Dick Turpin; "at least so she says."

All this was very well on the surface, but it was bitter, indeed, for Meg. She could not stay to hear more, and, as coherently as possible, she said a few farewell words and left the office.

She went, but, once out of their sight, her face assumed an expression like that of a fiend.

"I'm beaten for now," she thought, "but the end is not yet. The very argument he used to disarm me is additional reason why I should grind him under my heel. He knows too much—far too much—for my safety. One of us must die, and if human efforts can avail anything it shall be Rob Bradstreet!"

At the same moment the self-styled Bradstreet was receiving the congratulations of the mayor, but he did not lose much time in that way. It was already past the time when he had agreed to take Sibylla Marcy to her new refuge, for this interview had taken considerable time; and, as soon as possible, he made his excuses to the mayor and hastened to the hotel.

When he arrived there he called for "Mrs. Marcy."

"She's just gone out, sir," the clerk answered.

"What?"

"Just gone out. A gentleman came in a carriage and sent word up to her, and she came down with the children and went away."

Dick was momentarily dumfounded. He realized that a trick had been played, and that he

had lost a point in the game. Sibylla had fallen into unfriendly hands. Whose? He did not need to ponder on the point; there was but one man in Leadville to whom suspicion would point.

This was Jude Peterson, and, though it was not likely he had been in the carriage, Dick was sure he was at the bottom of it.

Further inquiry developed the fact that his own name had been sent up to Sibylla as a decoy, and, though he had cautioned her against tricks, it had been worked well for the kidnappers.

The Leadville Lion smiled quietly as he walked out of the hotel. It had become a battle between him and Jude Peterson, but, though the police spy had won the first move he had an advantage over him in that he knew all which Jude thought so secret, including his treachery; while Jude did not even know with whom he was dealing.

"I'll fool him yet; if I don't, my name isn't Turpin," thought the ex-road-agent. "I'll send a messenger to Red Kit and see if she has anything new."

Just then a voice pronounced his name and, turning quickly, he saw Red Kit, herself.

"Mr. Bradstreet," she said, hurriedly, "I want to speak to you."

"What is it?" he quickly asked.

"They have succeeded in abducting the lady and children."

"How do you know?"

"The woman has come back to their room, and the man—he came in just ahead of her—said that their plot had worked well, and that they were abducted."

"Did she tell him anything?"

"Yes; she had news which I did not hear, but it made him curse loudly."

Turpin chuckled.

"I thought it might be that way. But did you learn where they have imprisoned the lady and children?"

"No, but it is somewhere that they think is a safe prison."

"I'll wager something that I find it, just the same. I don't think violence will be offered the prisoners, and I propose to have them out in short order."

"Sheriff," the girl abruptly said, "I want to make a bargain with you. I've helped you some already, and I'll find your lost friends if you will then give me admittance to Dick Turpin!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NIGHT-PROWLER.

THE ex-road-agent started, and then shook his head.

"Why will you persist in bringing up that old subject? Dick Turpin is doing very well; he has a good nurse, who will pull him through if any one can. Rest assured, Dick will not want for anything."

"You don't understand, sheriff," Red Kit replied, in a trembling voice; "you don't know how I am situated. It may not be modest for me to confess it, but I was not brought up as a doll, and I will say that I love Dick Turpin better than my own life. When I first came to you and betrayed him, jealousy had rendered me insane. That's the most charitable way I can look at it; I think I was out of my mind. At any rate, it was as vile a deed as woman ever did, and—you know the result. Now, Dick lies there, sick, perhaps dying. Let me go to him, as a penance, and—because I love him!"

Her voice was low, humble and uncertain of inflection, but through it ran a vein of eagerness which told how much in earnest she was.

Dick Turpin was curiously moved. It is the fortune of but few men to stand and hear a woman speak of her auditor as though he were an entirely different person, but the Lion of Leadville could not but feel for the girl, but he remembered the desolation she had wrought and again shook his head.

"It can't be."

Red Kit sighed deeply.

"Is it so very much that I ask, after what I have done to help you?" she asked.

"That isn't the point, but I am an officer of law, and it would be positively criminal for me to admit as a nurse for a sick man one who—had done him injury in the past."

He found some trouble in choosing his words.

"Do you still believe that I would do him harm now?"

"No."

"Then why not admit me?"

Turpin shook his head in silence, and then, as a way out of the difficulty occurred to him, slowly replied.

"What good would it do you to go there and care for him? Suppose he should make a live of it. Isn't it just as well that he should die of brain fever, as for you to pull him through to his home?"

Red Kit started back with a sharp cry.

"Oh! sir," she exclaimed, "you don't mean that—that such will be the end?"

"There has been no trial," coolly replied he, "but what better can Dick Turpin, road-agent, outlaw and murderer, expect of us?"

"He is no murderer!" sharply retorted Red

Kit. "Road-agent he was, but he never harmed man while with the band. They called him the Lion of Leadville, but 'twas his dashing bravery which led to the name. He purified the band after he came, drove out the worst members, ordered that no blood should be shed, and even declined to keep what money fell to his share. What he took from the rich he gave to the poor, and all the needy in the hills bless his name."

"Yet you betrayed him."

The Lion of Leadville was in a bitter mood, and he could not avoid the retort.

"Yes, I betrayed him," replied Red Kit, all the fire gone from her voice; "may Heaven forgive me, I betrayed him! I would give my own life now if I could undo the mischief. Yes, I could even see him go away with—that other woman. I could forget my own troubles in one way, if not in another. There are none too sinful, and low, for death to be beyond their reach."

"Come, come, girl," said Turpin, beginning to feel guilty for plunging her into such sorrow, "this will not do. Whatever you have done, there is a better future ahead of you. Wrongdoing is better atoned for by living well, than dying ill. But let us drop this subject. Search for Sibylla Marcy if you will, and when you find her, we will talk again."

Red Kit was silent for a moment, and then she abruptly replied:

"I will find them!"

With these words she glided away into the darkness.

Dick watched her out of sight, and then resumed his own way, turning his steps toward Bowie Ben's quarters.

"I almost pity her, despite what she has done. She was once as light-hearted and buoyant as a bird, and deep sorrow has come to her. I could forgive what she has done me, but not what she has brought to Lois. When I think of that, it maddens me. Only for Red Kit's work Lois would now be my wife, and I should be many miles away, with all chances of living an honest, happy life, respected by all. And now—now—what must Lois think of me?"

He ground his teeth at the thought, and again his anger rose hotly against the girl. Knowing, as he did, that Bowie Ben loved her, he had of late hoped, when in a more merciful mood, that they would marry and Red Kit be saved to a happy life, but in his present mood he resolved that this should never be if he could influence Ben.

Red Kit must reap as she had sown.

On reaching his ally's room he found him just going out to take his place at the supposed Dick Turpin's bed; for Ben had the night watch. He asked him to sit down, however.

"I've been thinking, Ben, that I want to give you another piece of labor."

"Name it, captain," was the prompt reply.

"When I think of Lois Legrand, and remember how she must regard me, it seems as though my troubles would prove more than I can endure. Our band had a worse name than it deserved, and I, as leader, was called a cut-throat. Imagine what Lois must think of a man who, wooing her under honest guise, proves to be Dick Turpin!"

"It is hard, captain."

"Villainously hard!"

"Why don't you see her?"

"I dare not."

"Surely, she would not betray you."

"I do not fear that; she is by far too noble; but I do fear to go to her, now that she knows who I am. I fear she would drive me from her sight like the vile wretch that I am."

"It is said that woman's love can outlive all things."

"All but dishonor. Lois is all that I would have her, but her very qualities which are so admirable would lead her to despise me, an outlaw and road-agent."

Bowie Ben shook his head.

"I wish I could help you, captain, but the fact is, I know very little about how to manage a woman. They are just like a sail-boat; you've got to know how to handle the sails, and steer the craft, or there will be an everlasting row right through the whole cruise."

Whereupon the handsome young road-agent, feeling himself a philosopher, took a large bite of tobacco, and rolled it gracefully around his mouth.

"Well, I have an idea, Ben."

"And want my help? Good! Name the idea."

"I want you to go to Lois and deliver a message."

"From you?"

"No. That is, not directly. I want you to go there, introduce yourself as a friend of Dick Turpin, of Leadville, now lying at the point of death, and so on, and say to her that he has been maligned; that he is not so bad as men assert."

"By George! that's not a bad idea."

"It will gradually pave the way for me. See?"

"Just so, and, by the time you get around, she will have a better idea of you. Well, you can count me in, right from the word 'go.' Whatever I can do, shall be done!"

Dick grasped his ally's hand and shook it warmly.

"I felt that I could depend on your loyalty, Ben, and it is for you to show your diplomatic skill. Try to establish a good footing there; say all for me that you can truthfully—no more, Ben; no more, mind you; and try to turn her mind toward forgiveness. Represent yourself as my warm personal friend, and assure her that you know beyond question that, had I got away from here, I should have lived an honest life afterward. This is a fact."

Ben promised to attend to all the fine points of the affair, and then, as he was more than due at the sheriff's bedside, Dick walked over there with him.

The sick man's condition was, on the whole, favorable. His burns were doing very well, and were not likely to leave any disfiguring marks; and his fever was not, as yet, alarming. There was no way but for it to run its course, and the result lay with time.

The doctors were sure there was no severe injury to his head, and, though now unconscious of all that was transpiring around him, he was likely to recover full reason when the fever left him.

He now lay restlessly on his pillow, muttering a good deal, but never in a way which would indicate who, or what, he was. As long as he continued thus, he was not likely to expose the road-agent's deceit, and, had there been no other complications, Dick Turpin would have felt secure for some days.

But there were other complications, the chief of which arose from the presence of the Man with the Scar. He knew just who Dick was, and a word from him would hurl the adventurer to ruin. That word was liable to be spoken at any time, and the Lion of Leadville was, indeed, living over a smoldering volcano.

Leaving the hospital, Dick went outside. The hour had grown late and but few people were abroad. He paused near the corner of the building and looked around, undecided as to his next move.

As he did so he noticed something which at once claimed his attention. Adjoining the hospital building was a smaller one, the roof of which reached only to the main windows of the hospital. It was when looking in that direction that the ex-road-agent saw a dark form outlined against the sky.

It disappeared almost in the same moment that he discovered it, but enough time had been given for him to realize that a man was standing on the roof.

Instantly the Lion was on the alert. He did not believe that any legitimate object had taken the man there, and he determined to know more about him.

Quickly, but quietly, he glided around the building and reached the rear. He was not surprised to find a ladder leaning against the side. From that point the prowler was invisible, but Dick was sure that he was still on the roof, which was flat, and he crept lightly up the ladder.

Reaching the eaves, he looked for the unknown.

What he saw did not surprise him. The man was close to one of the windows, on his knees, and a slight clicking told that he was trying to force the window.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRAP AND THE VICTIM.

A GRIM smile swept over the Leadville Lion's face. He had given particular attention to these windows before, and knew that nothing short of an explosion would give the prowler admittance. He was not afraid of that, but he had a theory as to the identity of the man, and intended to learn how correct it was.

With all possible caution he drew himself up to the roof. The prowler was still at his work and heard nothing.

With a cat-like step, Dick moved along the firm roof, which neither creaked nor rattled under his feet. He reached the would-be burglar's side and laid his hand on the man's shoulder. Instantly, the latter sprang to his feet, showing considerable agility, but as he turned he saw Dick standing before him, while a leveled revolver looked him straight in the face.

As Dick had surmised, the prowler was Duke Hallock, his ex-lieutenant!

Duke seemed dumfounded, but the Lion of Leadville spoke in a hard voice:

"Hands up! Make one move to fight or escape, and you are a dead man!"

Hallock seemed to find words hard to command, but he finally muttered:

"Well, I reckon you've got the drop on me."

"I have," was the cool reply.

"What have I done that you should cover me with a weapon liable to blow my brains out at any moment?"

"Come, don't act the fool!" impatiently replied the adventurer. "Do you know who I am?"

"Sheriff Bradstreet, possibly."

"That's my name. Well, I find you trying to break in here, and you have the folly to ask what harm you were doing. Drop it! Let us talk like men. Why did you want to break into the hospital?"

The ex-lieutenant did not reply.
"Let me answer for you. You wanted to commit murder!"

"I did not!" retorted Duke.

"Nonsense! I know you, my man, as well as you know me. You are Duke Hallock, once lieutenant of Dick Turpin's band. You have got the idea into your stupid head that it was Dick who betrayed the band. You were never further from the truth. He did nothing of the kind, but you have sworn to kill him, just the same."

"Well, you seem to have it down fine," growled Duke.

"So I have. Am I sheriff here, only to close my eyes like an owl in daytime? No, sir; I am well-informed as to you and your doings."

"More traitors!" said Hallock, bitterly. "Well, say what you will, you can't make me believe that Turpin did not betray us."

"I swear that he did not. Your own daughter, Red Kit, confessed to you that she, alone, was responsible."

"The girl is infatuated with Turpin, and she took the blame on herself to save him."

"Rubbish! She only told you the truth. But, even if she had a motive for lying, I have none. Surely, you don't think I am 'infatuated' with this miserable Dick Turpin, whom we propose to hang before many days."

Duke was silent for a few moments, and then he sullenly replied.

"I don't know what your motive is, but I do believe Dick Turpin was a traitor."

"You are at liberty to believe what you choose," the self-styled sheriff impatiently replied. "I would as soon try to convince a mule as you. One thing I will say, however; you can't get to my prisoner if you try. That window, which looks so simple on the outside, is impregnable when you go further. Entrance is impossible. Now, sir, as your gang of desperadoes is so well riddled, I do not care to molest you, if you will take yourself off, out of my way. For this time you are at liberty to go, but if I catch you fooling around here again, I'll hang you higher than Haman!"

There was no misunderstanding this warning, spoken as it was. In the old days Duke had been his captain's favorite, and one of the wildest men in the band, but he was a monomaniac now and Dick dealt with him accordingly.

The ex-lieutenant was not convinced, nor did he intend to abandon his trail of vengeance, but the unexpected offer to let him go was something he could not afford to despise.

He therefore said, with more respect of manner, that he would take himself off, and, after some further talk, which included a repeated warning, he put the promise into execution. Dick followed him to the street and saw him move rapidly away, and the darkness soon hid his form from view.

Dick realized that the man was in a dangerous mood, and did not expect him to abandon his intentions, but the sick man was so well guarded that he had little fear that Duke would get to him. The interview had given the adventurer fresh confidence in his disguise. He had carefully controlled his voice, and not a suspicion entered Duke's mind that he had been talking with just the man he aspired to kill.

The Leadville Lion returned to the lodgings which had nominally become his when he assumed Bradstreet's identity.

He had never felt more friendless and wretched; he had never been in greater peril; he knew that, at any moment, he was likely to be unmasked; he knew that of all the people about him he could depend on Bowie Ben only; yet he laid down and slept calmly until morning.

His "nerve" was remarkable.

When he awoke he made a deliberate breakfast, and was just going out when a letter was brought him. He opened it and read as follows:

"SHERIFF BRADSTREET:—The undersigned has information of vast value to you. He can tell you where all the gold stolen by Dick Turpin's band, during the past two years, is stored. At present only one of the band knows this secret, and he is—Dick Turpin, of Leadville. As you are aware, he can't tell just now, because of his condition, and you can bet high that when he recovers he won't tell. Unless I speak nobody will ever see this gold; if I do, all who have lost through Turpin may be reimbursed. This will be good news for the merchants, and others, of Leadville.

"I would not share this gold with any one, but it is where no man can get it alone. I must have help. Come to Coffin Gulch to-night, at nine o'clock and you may meet me. I shall be entirely alone, and I rely on your honor that you will come the same way. I shall, however, take such precautions that, if you bring others, I shall know it and you will not see me.

PETE BROWN."

Twice Dick Turpin read this letter through, and then put it quietly away with the remark:

"I will go!"

At that same moment Jude Peterson and Meg were in the latter's room busily talking. They had, however, made the discovery that the walls of the room were very thin, and they took care not to raise their voices above a low pitch.

"By this time," Jude was saying, "Bradstreet must have received his letter."

"Do you suppose he will enter the trap?"

Meg asked the question feverishly, but Jude confidently replied:

"I do!"

"I am not so sure; he is shrewd and long-headed. You ought to have seen the way he conducted himself at his office when I went there with the mayor. Not for a moment did I suspect that he had a bombshell ready for me until he hurled it. Who would have supposed that he knew that chapter in my life, in which that old California fool figured?"

"We underrated him on that point," Jude confessed; "but that he is only human is proven by the fact that he does not suspect who I am. I have wormed my way into his confidence; even made myself his personal friend; and he does not suspect that I am his bitterest foe."

"I wonder will this new scheme work well?" Meg muttered, thoughtfully.

"I have no doubt of it. Once he is in our power, we can spread our slanders here in the city, and ruin him among all decent men, and then make such terms with him as we see fit."

"Oh! I long for revenge!" the woman exclaimed.

"Not so loud! Rest easy; revenge shall be yours. He is sure to walk into our present trap. My letter, with its allusions to Turpin's gold, will draw him to Coffin Gulch, and, once there, our men will give him no chance to escape. Have no fear, the scheme will work!"

Meg did not reply, but sat with her eyes glittering ominously. A new idea had entered her mind. Jude thought it prudent for him to be in Leadville when Bradstreet went to Coffin Gulch, so Meg, disguised as a man, was to have charge of the ruffians they had secured to trap the supposed sheriff; and the new idea in her mind was one she did not see fit to speak aloud.

"I shall have supreme control there; why can't I secure immediate revenge? If Rob Bradstreet is shut up anywhere, he may escape. There is a better way than that. Once let him fall into the hands of my allies, and I will have him strung up to the nearest tree. He shall hang like the dog he is. Aha! noble sheriff, you shall see how Meg Gregerson can hate!"

At noon the Lion of Leadville was visited by Bowie Ben, who announced that he had visited Lois Legrand. The girl was still too weak to leave her bed, but everything indicated speedy recovery.

"Well," said Dick, eagerly, "what was said of me?"

"I told her what you directed," Ben answered—"that I was a friend of Dick Turpin's, and that I wanted her to delay her judgment until she knew more about you, asserting at some length that you were not one-tenth part as bad as men said Turpin was."

"Well, what was her answer?"

"As near as I can remember, she answered thus:

"Sir, as a friend of Richard's, you are welcome, and I am glad to hear you speak well of him; but it was not necessary in this case. I suppose I must admit that Mr. Barnes and Dick Turpin are one, but I know him too well to believe he is very bad. As for Dick Turpin, the poor in these hills all sound his praise, for he has aided them often; but I know him better than they. Whatever he may be to the world, I am sure that great misfortune drove him to such a life, and I will honor and love him to the end!"

"Such, captain, were her words, as near as I can remember them."

Dick Turpin warmly grasped his ally's hand. He was no longer the Lion of Leadville, but a man with all the weaknesses of common mortals. He had placed confidence in Lois, despite all that was so dark in his career, but such strong confirmation as this made him inexpressibly happy.

Now, indeed, could he boldly face the countless dangers that hemmed him in. With the star of love shining brightly upon him, no peril was too great to be more than a pastime.

When he left Ben his head was proudly upheld, and his stride that of a conqueror. Dangers might threaten, but could not daunt him. He was again the Lion of Leadville.

All that day he was busy, but he did not forget the letter he had received. Shortly after dark he had Brutus saddled, and then rode away toward Coffin Gulch.

The night was dark and gloomy, with skurrying clouds in the sky and a mournful whistle of wind in the gulches. All this, however, was an old story to the ex-road-agent, and he went as coolly as though it were day.

Whom he was about to meet he did not know, but he sat boldly in the saddle as Brutus bore him on toward the place of meeting. Surely he ought not to fear any one man.

It lacked a few minutes of the appointed time when he rode into the somber shadows of Coffin Gulch.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HALTER FOR WILD DICK TURPIN.

COFFIN GULCH was only a small branch of a larger gulch, so there was no trouble to be an-

ticipated in the finding of "Pete Brown," as the writer of the note had signed himself.

Dick Turpin rode half-way, and then reined in Brutus and sat looking about him.

He did not have long to wait; a dark figure came from the foot of the cliff and, in reply to Dick's challenge, made answer:

"I am Pete Brown. Who are you?"

"Sheriff Bradstreet."

"Then we are well met. I am glad to see you here on time. Did you heed what I said, and come alone?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. We need lose no time, but come to business. Here is a rock just back of us; will you dismount and sit down there?"

"I suppose I may as well."

So saying, Dick slid from the saddle, left Brutus and followed Mr. Brown. The latter seemed to be a slight, boyish fellow, and perhaps it was this which led Turpin to comply with his requests so promptly. The youngster did not look dangerous. The rock proved to be one of several scattered at that point, and the two sat down side by side.

"I suppose you were surprised at getting my letter," said Brown, lightly.

"To a certain extent, I was, for I did not suppose Dick Turpin's stolen money would be found. I have been trying to learn all I could about the fellow, but I judge that my knowledge of him is slight compared to yours."

"I am well informed on that point," Brown confidently declared.

"Were you one of his band?"

"No, but I have had a good chance to learn all about him, and I have some things to tell which will surprise you. First of all, let me surprise you with the revelation that—you are my prisoner!"

Brown's voice suddenly changed in tone, growing sharp and stern.

"Eh? Hello! what's that?" echoed the supposed sheriff.

"Look to your right, sir!"

Dick Turpin looked. There stood a man with a revolver leveled at his head.

"Look behind you!"

Again Turpin obeyed. There stood two men in the same position as the first.

"You see how it is," Brown added. "Three revolvers are covering you, and, if you make one movement toward drawing a weapon, yourself, you will be shot as dead as the rock beside you. Mind; not one movement or you are a dead man!"

"Scoundrel!" hotly exclaimed Turpin, "what do you mean by such treachery? You promised to be alone, and to meet me as a friend. What do you mean by such infamous conduct?"

Brown laughed sarcastically.

"I mean that you are a blind fool! Oh! are you a sheriff, wise and experienced, and yet so idiotic as to be decoyed into a trap? Fool, poor fool! All this talk about Dick Turpin's gold is rubbish, for I know nothing about it. The long and short of it is, I wanted you in my power, laid a trap for you, and you walked blindly into it."

"But your motive—your motive?"

"To capture you."

"By the fiend, you want to go slow about this!" the self-styled sheriff declared. "I am a man of power hereabouts, and I'll make you squirm if you molest me. Send away your men, or I'll have every one of you hung inside a week!"

"Hung!" scoffed Brown. "That's a good joke—a peculiarly good joke. Still, I won't send away my men. On the contrary, one of them will now advance and bind your wrists, and if you try to resist, you will be shot dead!"

The trapped man protested warmly, but all in vain. The revolvers were turned inexorably upon him, and, as they were not safe things to defy, he had to remain inactive while one of the gang bound his wrists behind him.

"Brown!" then laughed mockingly.

"Fool! fool! you are, indeed, in my power, and it is time for me to tell who I am. My name is not Brown, nor am I a man. I am Meg Gregerson!"

A bitter exclamation fell from Turpin's lips.

"Tricked!" he added, hoarsely.

"Yes, tricked; and decoyed to your death. You had your day when in your office; now it's my turn. You were weak enough to be merciful, but I am not such an idiot. You are in my power, and the revenge which I covet shall be mine. Out yonder is a tree, small, but large enough for the purpose. Over one limb hangs a rope. In one end there is a noose. In five minutes you will be hanging there by the neck, dead! March him away, men!"

Again Dick Turpin protested, but he might as well have talked to the wind. He was dragged to the tree, and the noose flung over his head and drawn tight. Then the men seized the other end of the rope.

"You see, Rob Bradstreet," said Meg, hissing, "to what you have been brought by wronging me. You wooed me in the old days at Black Run, and then cast me off—"

"I wanted a wife, not a tigress," dryly interrupted Dick Turpin.

"You'll find that you are in the power of a tigress, for that's what you have made me. You shall die, and all because you wronged me, but one thing you must know before you go. Sibylla Marcy is my prisoner!"

"Indeed! Where do you keep her?"

"That is my business."

"But you might tell a dying man."

"I will not. Enough that she lives, and that I will crush the life out of her because you dared love her. She is your wife, I suppose, and her children yours, also. Let it be your knowledge as you die that I will torment and torture those three with every device which I can invent!"

Meg fairly hissed the words, but Dick's voice showed no trace of emotion as he replied:

"All this sounds well, but like most schemes hatched by woman, it lacks one thing. Success is the most important element of a plot, and yours can't raise a ripple on the pond. I might use many words to show what I mean, but I'll illustrate instead. Now, suppose that, instead of being hung, I should seize you by the shoulder—so!"

He had illustrated. As he spoke one of his hands fell heavily on Meg's shoulder, and then he whistled shrilly. The sound had hardly passed his lips before several men sprung from the cover of the rocks, and Meg and her gang found the tables completely turned.

Each one of the men found himself covered with at least one rifle, and Dick's grasp held Meg a helpless prisoner. It seemed to the dumfounded gang like witchcraft, but the Lion of Leadville burst into a ringing laugh.

"What do you think now, Mrs. Donaldson? Did I not say that your plans lacked something? How about the fine sarcasm you bestowed on me? Who is the fool now? From the moment that I received your letter I suspected that it was intended to decoy me into a trap. More than that, I suspected that it was your work. I determined to find out. When I said that I came here alone I told the truth, but I had previously sent some of my men to arrange this counter-ambush. You can see how it worked. As for my own course, I wanted to give you enough rope to hang yourself—not me—so I held my peace. Your man who tied my wrists thought he did a good job, but he didn't tumble to the fact that I was fooling him as to the size of my wrists. He was a bungler!"

Meg had listened like one stupefied, but, as she realized how her cunning enemy had duped her from first to last, her anger rose to a murderous pitch.

She carried a long, murderous knife for the occasion and, secretly getting it in her hand, she wheeled upon the ex-road-agent and lunged for his heart with all her force.

She almost shrieked with rage at the result; Dick caught her wrist neatly in his broad hand, wrenched away the knife and then held her off at arm's length.

"You lose again!" he said, in a hard voice. "By my life, if you were not a woman it would go hard with you. You are a veritable demon, and seem no better than when you fed your old husband on arsenic in the California days. Take care, woman, that I don't send you across the plains to be tried for that crime. Here, Briggs, take her!"

He pushed the woman into the arms of one of his men, and then turned to her allies.

They were still cowering before the rifles of his own men, and not at all hard to secure. He asked them no questions, for he knew all that he cared to; they were common ruffians of Leadville, hired for the work by Meg, in her disguise. It was not likely that Jude Peterson had appeared in the case, as he aspired to seem uncommonly shrewd.

Having got his prisoners together, Dick led his men back to the city. On the way he settled Meg's case in his mind. Since she was so venomous he would not again allow her to go free; he would imprison her on the charge of having conspired to kill him, and then use his discretion about announcing her as the murderess of Donaldson, later.

It remained to be seen what Jude Peterson would do when he found his ally in trouble.

In due time Leadville was reached and the prisoners consigned to jail. Meg had confessed that she knew where Sibylla and her children were, and Dick now made an effort to draw the information from her.

The woman, however, stubbornly refused to tell, even bitterly rejecting an intimation that she could go free if she would tell. She declared that they were beyond his reach, and would be forever kept there.

Turpin did not waste much time with her then, but went home and to bed. When he arose in the morning he found Bowie Ben waiting to see him.

"Last night," Ben explained, "a stranger called on me and seemed very anxious to know where you were."

"What sort of a looking man?"

"Well, he was well advanced in years, and his most noticeable point was a peculiar, V-shaped scar on one cheek!"

CHAPTER XX.

"DICK TURPIN IS AGAIN IN THE SADDLE!"

THE Leadville Lion started. He did not need to ask for further description. Well did he know who had called upon Ben, and it showed that the Man with the Scar was still active.

"Indeed!" he replied. "Well, what did this man want?"

"That I don't know; all he said was that you were away, and he wanted to know where you had gone. I asked him why he did not apply to some of your fellow-officers, instead of a poor colored man, but he made an impatient gesture and answered that there was no necessity for masks being on between me and him; that he had come to me as the man of all men most likely to know about you."

"Well—the result?"

"Of course, I denied all, and he left without pressing me to any great extent."

"Without saying what he wanted of me?"

"Yes. Of course I took the alarm, for it was clearly something more than chance which made him come to me, and I have lost no time in notifying you. Is the game up, captain?"

Dick Turpin shook his head.

"I don't know."

"But how do you account for his visit, and who is he?"

"The first question I can't answer; the second I can, for the Man with the Scar has been a feature of my whole life; the nightmare of my existence; the realization of the weird imaginations of old German writers who separate fiction from fact by an impassable wall."

"Who is he? I say that I know, and yet I do not. Even his name is a mystery to me; I know him only as 'The Man with the Scar,' though he is a man of countless names. Does this sound vague and wild? I will explain."

"When I was a child—four or five years old—I was one day playing near my home when along came a man of middle age who stopped and spoke to me. How he looked I can't tell, except that on one cheek was a V-shaped scar. This was so prominent that I looked at that, and that only, though before my childish mind floated an idea that I had seen him before, earlier in my life; a time which seemed long, long before."

"I was now afraid of him, but he talked in a low, caressing voice, and ran his hand gently across my curls. He asked my name and many other things, and then said, his voice utterly without emotion: 'I may some time have to kill you, my pretty boy!'"

"Terrified, I ran from him to my mother, and when she had heard whom I had seen, she clasped me nervously in her arms and closed the house like a tomb. I remember that she said the Man with the Scar was my enemy, and hers, but if she said more, it passed from my childish mind."

"Three years later, an orphan boy at a boarding-school, I again saw the Man with the Scar. This time he actually saved me from drowning, when I was seized with a cramp while bathing. I remembered him well, and what my mother had said, but he was kind in an indifferent way, besides saving me, and I could not run from him as I had done before. To an employee who soon appeared he said that his name was Harrington, but would not even enter the gate of the school inclosure. He went his way, and I saw him no more for a year."

"At that time he reappeared at the school, though seen only by me. I called him 'Mr. Harrington' then, but he said that his name was Harbeck. He soon went away. That night the main school-building was burned to the ground, an hour before the time of retiring. It was found that the fire originated in my room, and I was arrested for intentionally causing it."

"I was innocent, but I remembered that the Man with the Scar had particularly asked regarding the location of my room. I knew who had set the fire, but nobody believed my story."

"My youth saved me from prison, or, more likely, the reform school, and a benevolent gentleman took charge of me. I was regarded as a 'tough boy,' but he hoped to reform me. I stayed with him two years, and then the Man with the Scar reappeared. I ran to my protector and told him all. He interviewed my old enemy, who courteously gave the name of Laidlaw, and smiled forgivingly at my accusations, so that my protector took no heed of what I said. I was angry and spoke unkindly to my friend for the first time."

"That night his house was burned. I knew who had done it, and though arrest was delayed, I knew who was suspected. I would not be believed, so I packed a small valise and fled. Going to New York, I shipped on a schooner plying between that port and Savannah, as cabin-boy; a very young one, but I was large for my age."

"It was about a year later that, when in a sailors' hotel in New York, I saw the Man with the Scar enter the place. He did not see me looking at him, but I knew he was on my track. He registered, and I went to the book and read: 'Jos. P. Brown, City.' When morning came I was miles away from New York. I had run away, found a chance to ship at the last moment on a vessel bound to Calcutta, and was off on that voyage."

"For three years I saw no more of the Man

with the Scar, but, one evening, I saw in a hotel register at Melbourne, Australia, the entry: 'D. Loewenstein, Leipsic, Prussia.' In the handwriting I recognized the arrival of my enemy, the Man with the Scar, and, though my boyish terror had about worn away, I decided to give him the slip. By unusual frugality, I had saved some money, and, desiring a good education, I went to England and entered a good school."

"Here I passed a year quietly, and then I was accused of maliciously killing a fine dog belonging to one Doctor Bruce Abercrombie. Confronted with my accuser, I found him to be the Man with the Scar! This time I faced him boldly, and we fought a drawn battle. I could not make people believe ill of him, and he could not prove his charge against me."

"This defeat actually seemed to amuse the strange man, and, during the remaining two years I remained at school, I often saw him and received a cheery greeting. I bearded him in his den, too, and tried to learn who and what he was, but he laughed at me good-humoredly, and I got no satisfaction."

"I finally returned abruptly to this country, and settled in Chicago. Six months later, at an evening party, I was presented to a 'Colonel McBride.' I looked at him, and lo! it was the Man with the Scar!"

"To go on in detail would tire you, so let me say at a breath that, during the dozen years which have since elapsed, this strange being as often crossed my path. Once he saved my life in New Orleans, and several times he has done me an injury."

"During all my vicissitudinous career he has flashed, ever and anon, across my path, but, in the few years preceding my union with the road-agent band, he assumed a hostile attitude, which made me hate him more than ever, and our last meeting—which I will not describe here—was, indeed, a bitter one."

"Then he disappeared, and it was by chance that I heard of him with your band. I came on at once to see him. He had vanished. I, however, joined the band, hoping he would return. Except for that, I should never have been a road-agent."

"In conclusion, though you ask who and what he is, I can only answer: He is the Man with the Scar, and my enemy. More than that I do not know, but, as he knows of my deceit here, he may unmask me at any moment."

"This sounds as wild as a dream!" muttered Ben.

"It is a nightmare of facts. I suppose the Man with the Scar is human, like ourselves, but if I had a grain of superstition, I should say that he was Old Nick, himself."

"But what are you going to do—wait for him to expose you?"

"I have directed some of the officers to watch for, and arrest, him, intending, if he is taken, to have him confined as a lunatic, but, so far, they cannot find him. But I am not wholly sure that he will betray me."

"I should be afraid of it."

"So I am afraid of it."

"Why do you suppose he wanted you?"

"It is impossible to say."

"Well, if I were you, I'd use every endeavor to find, and cripple him. He who gets the first blow always has the best chance to win."

"True, but do you know that I have but little faith in the ability of the police to find him? If he is only human, he is certainly wonderfully cunning."

Bowie Ben was plainly ill at ease. He was a bold young fellow, but arrest meant long imprisonment, if not violent death, to him and his leader, and the fact that there was in Leadville a man who could ruin them both with a word, was far from being agreeable.

Still, he had no intention of deserting Dick, and, after a long talk, he announced his intention of looking for the Man with the Scar, himself.

Dick had ordered that Meg Gregerson should see no visitors whatever, and, until noon, even he kept away from her. He then went to ask if she would reveal where Sibylla Marcy was imprisoned, but she was sullen and ugly, and would say nothing.

Jude Peterson attended to his regular duties, and not in any way did he reveal interest in the case except as an officer, nor was his manner less friendly toward Dick Turpin.

The latter played his part equally well, and the game of double deceit went on.

Shortly after noon, when Dick was alone in the office, a man walked in. At first glance the ex-outlaw recognized him as one of the men of "Old Man Hicks." The latter will be remembered as the person selected as jailer for Sam Tobin. Hicks had been let into Dick's secret, but all his associates were in the dark.

"Is this Sheriff Bradstreet?" asked the newcomer.

"Yes."

"Well, I've come from Old Man Hicks, and I've come flying. He told me to kill the horse on the journey, by hard riding, and I came so near it that I was ashamed to ride the brute into Leadville, so I left him just outside. Boss, I've come from Hicks's in the biggest time on record,

and all to bring a note from the Old Man. Here it is!"

He tossed a sealed envelope on the table.

Dick Turpin could not but surmise what all this haste meant, and he hastily broke open the envelope.

This is what was written on the note-paper inside:

"OLD PARD:—The man y'u leff hear has got away. I'm mitey sorra, butt it was knot my fawlt. Hiz moavments inderkate that he is maikin' fore Flash Camp, an' I hoap you can cutt him oph by strikin' Ben Hoaw's staig. Try it, an' if y'u git him ag'in, bring him hear an' I will hold him if I haiv to hed him upp in a barril.

"Youres fathful,

"OLD MAN HICKS.

"P. S. It wa'n't my fawlt he gott away.

"Taik Notis. Don't trust Bairer 2 mutch."

Not by so much as the quivering of a muscle did Dick Turpin show emotion, but he did not fail to realize the full danger. Sam Tobin had escaped and was making for Leadville as fast as possible, wild to tell the people that the Lion of the road was perpetrating a daring deceit in their very midst; and if he reached there successfully, the road-agents' last hope was gone.

Dick, however, remained as cool as ever, and dismissed the bearer of the note with unruffled manner and a liberal reward. Then he mentally summed up the situation.

"Hicks thinks he is coming by the Flash Camp stage, but I have no means of knowing definitely. It is like the casting of a die. If he comes any other way, all is lost. If he tries to come by way of the stage he will not get here; he will meet Dick Turpin on the road. Yes, the instinct of self-preservation is strong, and I will find Bowie Ben and take to the trail. For one day, at least, Dick Turpin is again in the saddle!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LEADVILLE LION'S SWOOP.

As soon as possible Dick sought Bowie Ben and told him what news he had received. The young man looked dismayed, and then his face suddenly grew stern.

"This must be prevented. If Tobin reaches here, you are ruined. He must not reach here!"

"How can it be prevented?"

"By my life! I can prevent it. I'll swoop down on the stage, drag him out by the heels, and take him back to Hicks's."

"You're a brick, Ben, my boy! I have courage now to say what I wanted to say. For one night, Ben, let us go on the road again. We'll disguise ourselves, attack the stage, capture Sam Tobin, and then see if we can keep the slippery chap close."

"I'm with you, Cap."

"Good!"

The two shook hands, and then Dick went away to make arrangements. It would not do for him to ride Brutus on such an expedition as this, but two good horses were selected, and some grotesque disguises chosen. They wanted nothing to resemble their old style of doing business on the road.

Judging time closely, they finally rode away from the city, and to the place where they proposed to operate. If the stage happened to have many passengers, there was a chance that the two road-agents would have a hot time; but Dick relied a good deal on the sense of security which had followed the destruction of his band.

Having reached the gulch where he intended to strike the stage, they stopped and assumed their disguises. As has been said, these were grotesque. Over their heads they wore a species of skull-cap, made of blue flannel, which covered their heads to their shoulders; and each wore a woman's shawl over his shoulders and body. Thus equipped, it was impossible to tell anything about their faces or forms.

They impatiently waited for the stage to arrive.

Perhaps half an hour had passed when Dick Turpin's quick ears detected the rumble of wheels, and the vehicle soon came in sight.

The road-agents held their horses back in niches in the face of the cliffs and waited.

Nearer came the stage.

Dick was looking eagerly for signs of Sam Tobin, but no such signs were at first vouchsafed. A man sat on the box beside the driver, but he was not the one they wanted. Still nearer came the stage, until it was nearly between them, and then Dick made a motion to Ben, and they rode from cover. A moment more and his voice sounded—not like Dick Turpin's of old, but in a deep roar.

"Halt, Ben Howe! Pull in your horses, or we'll fill ye fuller o' lead than a graveyard. Hands up!"

Ben Howe was an old hand at the ribbons, and a wise one, too, and though he had thought never to be halted again, now that Dick Turpin was a prisoner, he "pulled up" gracefully and obediently.

His companion on the box was not so docile.

"What's this?" he cried.

"Road-agents, I s'pect," Ben coolly answered.

"That's just the figger, gents," Turpin replied. "I an' my pard is ther new kings o' ther road, an' our name is 'Ther Winnin' Pair.'"

Haul out yer rocks, gents, or we will bore ye all full o' yawnin' tunnels!"

"Don't tunnel here!" said Howe, quickly. "I'm ther most peac'ble critter in seven counties."

The man on the box beside him, however, was not of that opinion. He was a tenderfoot from the far East, and not only brave naturally, but of the opinion that a bold stand would scare the toughest road-agent "clean out of his boots," so he drew a revolver and—

The weapon went spinning from his hand, and fell on the ground several feet away. Dick Turpin had fired first, and with that remarkable skill which never failed him. The bullet had knocked the other revolver neatly from the tenderfoot's grasp.

"That will do!" said the leader of the "Winning Pair," in a voice which made the tenderfoot shake in his boots. "Ben Howe, what have you got inside?"

"Two females, an' a male man."

"I'll see them."

Turpin strode forward and soon had a view of the interior. He did not expect any resistance there, and he was not disappointed. The women proved to be middle-aged, with plenty of jewelry, while the man was just the person the road-agent wished to see.

Sam Tobin was intercepted.

He had probably taken to the inside of the stage for safety, and looked anything but beligerent now. The ladies looked to him for protection, but he did not respond properly. Not a weapon did he possess, and he was looking anxiously at the masked man, to see if there was any resemblance to Dick Turpin.

The latter was now at his ease. As long as Sam had only women for his companions in the vehicle it was not likely that he had told his story, and the Lion anticipated no trouble in getting him away.

Not at once did he pay attention to Sam, however. Appearances must be kept up, and he called on the ladies for their money and jewels. There was the usual amount of talk, but the spokesman of "The Winning Pair" was inexorable, and they had to comply.

Then Dick turned to the man.

"Fork over, pilgrim!" he tersely said.

"I would gladly do so, but I haven't a cent to my name," Sam declared.

"Nonsense! That dodge is played out. Shell out!"

"But, sir, I assure you—"

"An' I assure you we pards ain't to be bluffed. Pass over ther bullion, or up ther golden stairs you go!"

Sam still protested, and, when he had carried the parley far enough for due effect on the other passengers, Dick pretended to become angry.

"This sort o' thing is all very well fur you, but it's ther rule o' The Winnin' Pair that nobody passes ther gate 'thout payin' toll; so, pilgrim, you kin jest step out, an' we'll take you ter our den an' hold ye fur ransom, b'gosh!"

Sam protested still further, but there was no help for it, and he reluctantly alighted. Bowie Ben had been holding the driver and the tenderfoot under good behavior with his revolver, and the latter was next relieved of his ready cash.

Then Turpin addressed Howe.

"Driver, you kin amble on, an' say ter them you meet that Ther Winnin' Pair is hyar ter stay. We're all ther way from Arizony, an' strangers in these yer diggin's; but we're sociable an' friendly, an' mean ter git acquainted. We hold daily picnics, an' you kin say ter them ez hez more cash than they kin carry, that we are pow'ful helpers. Tell 'em ter pass along ther tin, an' we'll bank it furthem. Now, drive on!"

Howe promptly obeyed, and the stage rolled away and left The Winning Pair and Sam Tobin as sole occupants of the ground. Sam looked decidedly anxious, and Dick turned to him with a grim smile and spoke in his natural voice.

"Well, old man, you haven't quite made the rifle!"

"I thought it was you," said Sam, surlily.

"Shows your good sense, but, great Scott! you didn't expect to get to Leadville, did you?"

The prisoner grated his teeth. He was in a passion, and would have given a good deal of money to possess a revolver for just a few seconds.

"Jeer on!" he growled. "My day may come yet."

"Samuel, ain't you a trifle sorry to have bucked against me?—like the man who wrestled with the grizzly."

"No. I am an honest man, and you are a notorious desperado. Right and justice are on my side, and I will live to see you hung."

"An honest man, are you? I've looked up your record, Samuel, and find that you have been twice dismissed from Sheriff Bradstreet's force; once for getting drunk and smashing everything in a crockery store, and again on suspicion of being in league with thieves. Influence put you back, but it didn't make an honest man of you—not by a blamed sight! Comrade, tie him up!"

Sam had no choice in the matter, and he was soon bound. Bowie Ben then rode away for the spare horse which he had secreted near by dur-

ing the day, and, returning with it, the prisoner was soon mounted, and the trio en route for Old Man Hicks.

They did not spare horseflesh on the way, but, setting into a rapid pace at once, sped away through gulch and canyon as though riding for life.

Little was said by the way; each man was busy with his thoughts.

Dick Turpin had again averted the hour of exposure, and he did not intend that Tobin should have another chance to betray him. Old Man Hicks was to be relied upon, and it was not likely that he would again allow his prisoner to slip through his fingers.

The Leadville Lion, however, was not without fears that he would be connected with this fresh operation on the road. He had left a good excuse to account for his absence from the city, but that might not save him.

He could not but wonder that exposure had so long been averted, and, as he was literally hemmed in with perils, there was no knowing where the blow might fall.

Continuing their way, the riders made mile after mile at the same wild gait. It brought the old days vividly back to Dick Turpin, but he felt none of the exhilaration he had known when he was at the head of the band which had given him his notoriety. His heart seemed like a lump of lead in his breast, and his misled life was a specter which filled him with gloomy thoughts.

Driven to a life on the road by great misfortunes, he now longed for an honest life, as a dying man craves the drink of water he can see but not touch.

Their destination was reached in due time, and Old Man Hicks received them warmly. He convinced Dick that he was not to blame for Sam's escape, which had been due to unexpected ingenuity on the latter's part; and showed a new arrangement for holding the slippery fellow, which all agreed was likely to prove strong enough to defy the prisoner's efforts.

Accordingly, Sam was again put in captivity, and the expression of his face was hopeless.

Hicks then brought out something for his guests to drink, and was delivering a little oration, when a ridden horse dashed up to the door at full speed, his body white with foam.

"A woman, by Jehosaphat!" exclaimed Hicks, looking at the rider, while a troubled look appeared on Dick's face.

The new-comer was Red Kit!

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH BULLETS ARE TRUMPS.

FRESH dangers flashed before Dick Turpin's mental vision. He could think of nothing which would bring Red Kit there unless it was to see him, and the condition of her horse showed that she had come in hot haste.

He ran quickly outside, and met her at the door.

"What now?" he asked abruptly.

"Sheriff, I've found that lady!" she as promptly replied.

"Sibylla Marcy?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Imprisoned in the mountains a few miles back with three or four men as guards—at least, they are there."

"Did you see her?"

"Not to speak with her, but I did see her and both children at a distance. I told you I would find them, and I have."

Red Kit had not looked so much like herself since the downfall of the band. She was again clothed neatly, though not in the gaudy style of old; her brick-red hair was well taken care of; and the rapid ride had brought the roses back to her cheeks.

"How did you find me?" Turpin thoughtfully asked.

"I saw you and two other men pass through Windward Canyon this evening just before dark. I was then about to reconnoiter at the cabin where I thought Sibylla was, and when I had got the necessary information I followed you here. Whenever I thought you might have left a direct course, I dismounted, lit a match, and looked for your horses' tracks. Oh! I've not lived in these mountains all my life without being a trailer."

Dick had another question to ask; one which troubled him considerably. Had she recognized Bowie Ben? If so, the association of a known ex-road-agent with the self-styled "sheriff" might arouse suspicion.

"Did you recognize my companions?"

"No."

The answer came promptly, and with seeming frankness.

"So you think Sibylla may be rescued?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you will guide us there?"

"Certainly."

"Then we will go at once. Remain here and I will soon join you. Wait! come in, and the man of the house will give you a cup of coffee."

Dick then went to Bowie Ben, who had wisely retreated from sight. The Leadville Lion was in a quandary. It was necessary to have the aid of his faithful follower if there were so many

men where Sibylla was confined; but would it do to let Red Kit see that Ben was on such good terms with him? Would it not arouse suspicion?

He explained this dilemma to his ally, who at once replied:

"I'll go disguised. With these garments on, my figure looks wholly different from that of Ben, the road-agent; and I'll wear the skull-cap I used when we attacked the stage."

There were objections which might be made against this, for it would look singular, to say the least, to see a sheriff's assistant go disguised so fantastically, but there did not seem to be any other way; so Dick agreed to the plan, and preparations were made for the start.

The Lion watched Red Kit sharply when Ben appeared, so grotesquely attired, but she did not seem to pay any attention to him after one glance.

Fresh horses had been procured from Hicks, and they were put to a sharp pace and the trio rattled rapidly along the back-track. Nobody else seemed astir, and they reached the vicinity of the house where Sibylla was imprisoned without adventure.

It proved to be a long shanty, covering a good deal of ground, and put together more firmly than the average of such buildings. Leaving their horses secreted in a ravine, they went as near as was safe and then paused to map out their plan.

Red Kit explained where she believed Sibylla's room to be, and then they considered the chances.

A light shone from what seemed to be the main room, and Dick Turpin determined to have a look inside. He accordingly left the others and crept forward. He was no sooner gone than Kit turned to her remaining companion.

"Ben, you are doing well," she quietly said.

"Eh? I don't exactly understand, miss, and my name is not Ben," he answered, with some trepidation.

"Nonsense! Don't let us lose time by sparring with words, for I have something to say before Bradstreet comes back. He isn't the worst man in the world, but it won't do to let him know too much—much learning may make him mad, as somebody said. Of course I know you, Bowie Ben, and that you have played a game on the sheriff and got a chance to take care of Dick Turpin. You don't know how glad I am of it, Ben, for I know you will care for him well; but beware of Bradstreet! If he suspects, you would be in trouble, too."

Bowie Ben forgot all else in his desire to ask a question:

"Would you care, Kit?"

"Of course, for you are my friend."

"Nothing more?"

"Now, don't mention that. You know what I have told you, Ben, and I want to be your friend. I can't be more. Please don't be angry, Ben, for I don't know that I have a friend in the world besides you!"

Her mournful, unsteady voice touched the young man, who quickly replied:

"I will be your friend to the end, Kit; don't be afraid in that respect; and if I can ever help you, I will."

"Can you prevail upon Sheriff Bradstreet to let me be one of Dick's nurses?" she eagerly asked.

Bowie Ben hesitated. He knew that the self-styled Bradstreet was against the idea, but would it not bring Kit near him? Ben was only human, and he promised to use his influence.

At this point the Leadville Lion was seen returning and conversation ceased. They looked innocent enough as he came up.

"Three men are in the main room," he reported, "and I can see but one way to get them out. They must come out, for the only entrance to Mrs. Marcy's room is through the one where they now are. We must lure them out."

"What's your plan?" Ben asked.

"In the smaller shanty, yonder, their horses are kept. There is no one there at present. Well, I propose that you go there and raise a racket, giving them the idea that some one is stealing the animals; and if they rush out, as I hope, I will then hurry Mrs. Marcy and the children out by the rear door. If this don't work, I must call on them in my official capacity to surrender their prisoners, but, as I've said before, I don't want to do this."

He had a good reason for this; it would show that he had been near the scene of the stage-robbery, when he wanted to be thought in exactly an opposite direction.

Ben readily agreed to perform his part, and they prepared for the attempt. Dick took his station near the rear door, and anxiously waited for his ally to begin.

Suddenly a loud whinny sounded from the stable. Even a horse was helping them. Then came a tremendous racket from the same point, and the men in the room looked excitedly at each other.

"What's that?" one asked.

Then came a louder racket, accompanied by a good deal more whinnying. Ben had found some way to excite the horses, and was making the most of it.

"By ther fiends!" cried one of the men, "somebody is stealin' our hosses!"

"That's ther figger—it's hoss-thieves!"

"By ther Furies! we'll make it hot fur them. Come on, men! Draw your sixes, an' we'll fill ther villains up with lead. Come on!"

And then, greatly to Dick's satisfaction, out they rushed in a body. The coast was clear!

Quick as a flash the Leadville Lion opened the rear door and ran in. That which led to Sibylla's room was secured by a wooden bar, but he cast it off and tore the door open. There stood Sibylla, pale and alarmed, her children both clinging to her. Her face brightened wonderfully at sight of Dick, and she advanced with outstretched hands, but he could lose no time.

"Quick!" he exclaimed; "we must get away at once. A minute's delay may ruin all."

"Give me one of the children!"

It was a woman's voice, and Red Kit flashed past Dick and caught up the little girl. Turpin seized the boy, and then, somehow—Sibylla could never realize how—they all got out of the shanty and into the open air.

But the danger was not over.

The men had quickly discovered that there were no horse-thieves about, and one of their number had been shrewd enough to suspect a trick. They came running back just in time to see the rescuers, and rescued ones, hastening away, and then fierce yells arose from them.

"A trick!—a trick!"

"They've got ther woman an' ther kids. Shoot them down! Fill them up with lead!"

And with these yells they came rushing toward the weaker party, and a bullet fired by one whistled close to Dick Turpin's head.

Bowie Ben had joined his friends, and neither he nor Dick felt the least fear of the pursuers; if they were inclined to return their fire, their remarkable skill with the revolver would make itself felt, even in the darkness. Both, however, wished to avoid bloodshed, if possible. It would never do, though, to allow the women and children to be made targets, and, seeing that Sibylla remained unexpectedly cool, Dick handed the child to her, saying:

"Go on in charge of Red Kit; obey her in all things and you will be safe. Ben and I will stand at bay."

All this was quickly done, and, as the non-combatants hurried on, Dick and his ally halted. At a word from the former Ben joined him in drawing a revolver, and the Lion then added:

"Give a volley over their heads!"

It was done, but without effect, and the situation became serious. The strangers were coming on, and a shower of bullets began to whistle around the fugitives. Dick and Ben were giving ground slowly, but in such a way as to allow their charges to gain ground. The stubborn pursuit, however, was dangerous; chance shots were liable at any moment to dispose of the ex-road-agents; and then Sibylla and the others would be unprotected.

This thought stirred Turpin to action.

"They will have it, Ben!" he said, "and it's madness to hold off any longer. Aim at their legs, and shoot to hit."

"I'm with you!"

Ben spoke with a nonchalant coolness, for this affray brought the old days and stirred his blood to rapid action; it was a rare bit of fun, by the way, to him.

Both men fired together, aiming as Dick had directed, and the rapidity with which they worked their revolvers was remarkable. A perfect hailstorm of lead went flying toward their pursuers, and these fellows were shown a sample of shooting in a way not to their taste.

Two of them went down, their legs shot through and through, and only one remained. He, however, seemed to bear a charmed life, and came flying onward, with reckless courage. Dick did not like to pull trigger on such a gallant man, jailer of a woman though he was, but the jailer had no such scruples, himself; his revolver kept working, and, as a bullet tore through the Lion's sleeve, he accepted the inevitable and fired to hit.

Down went the pursuer, with a broken leg.

Nobody was left to obstruct their retreat, and the two victors hastened to rejoin Red Kit and her charges. The brave mountain girl had them mounted and ready for flight, but the result enabled them to go as they saw fit.

The entire party mounted and rode away. Each horse now had a double load, but there was no haste, and they could bear it.

And so they rode on through the night, each busy with his, or her, thoughts; and, surely, there could hardly have been more diversity of opinion, for many a thread of love, plot, and more or less harmless double-dealing ran through all.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE INVISIBLE HAND.

THE question now arose, what was to be done with Sibylla? Of course it was imperative that she should be placed somewhere that she would be beyond the reach of her enemies. So far as she was concerned, there was no light as to the identity of these enemies. She had been abducted as the hotel-keeper said, but by whom, or why, she could not explain or surmise.

Dick Turpin could have explained all this had he seen fit, but he said nothing.

He knew very well that Sibylla would not be safer because Meg Gregerson-Donaldson was in prison; the sly, secret, ever-active Jude would gladly seize a chance to offset the captivity of his ally by again seizing Sibylla.

Yes, she must be securely concealed; so securely that all the arts of the enemy could not find her.

But where?

It was Red Kit who found an answer to this question.

"Give her into my charge," she said. "Get quiet quarters somewhere for her, the children and me, and let me take care of them. If anybody gets them away from under my eyes, they'll have to be smarter than I take them to be."

The proposition struck all forcibly. Young as Red Kit was, she was almost as capable as a man of taking care of herself, and Sibylla had taken a strong liking to the girl since she knew how much she owed her.

Dick Turpin was forcibly impressed, and he believed that Red Kit would be faithful. True, her treachery stood as one of the most prominent features in his life, but she was trying hard to win back her clearer record. Yes, he felt sure Sibylla would have a faithful friend in the mountain girl; but even then he hesitated.

He could not look at Kit, or think of her, without intense bitterness in his mind; but, despite all, she was near him a good deal of the time. He felt that he ought to drive her away like a leper, but she persisted in invading his daily life.

"Let me redeem myself," she had once said to him, and she seemed trying to do so; but how, he asked himself, could she ever make amends for what her treachery had wrought?

His one great wish now was that Bowie Ben might win her love, as he had long been trying to do, and take her forever beyond his sight.

Just now she was valuable as an ally, and it would certainly be indiscreet to drive her away.

It was settled that Red Kit's plan should be adopted, and as Turpin could think of no better place of refuge than that he had previously selected for Sibylla, it was arranged that they should go there at once, late as was the hour. This plan was carried out, and the women and children duly installed in their new quarters.

Dick had avoided a private conversation with Sibylla, for he saw how it would end. Her eyes had a sad, reproachful look, and it was clear that, despite the rescue, she was beginning to regard herself as an unloved wife.

As soon as he could get away Dick went to his room, threw himself on the bed in a weary, hopeless way, and tried to lose his troubles in sleep. In this he was completely successful, and several hours of peaceful rest followed.

In the morning he found awaiting him a formal printed invitation to attend a ball to be given the evening of the next day by the mayor. This was one of the great social and fashionable features of Leadville life. At regular intervals the mayor gave a ball, and nobody ever refused an invitation.

Dick Turpin knew something about these affairs, and he was well aware that the real Sheriff Bradstreet never missed one of them. That gentleman had been eminently a business man since Leadville knew him, but he broke away from all cares when the mayor gave a ball, and enjoyed himself.

His impersonator knew this, and knew, too, that he would be expected to be there; but he tossed the card impatiently aside.

"For once, the sheriff will remain away," he muttered.

He remained strong in his opinion for several minutes, and then a spirit of bravado assailed him. Why should he not attend the ball? Often he had been in Leadville, in disguise, and heard himself commented upon by the class of people who would be at this gathering.

He had seen fastidious young ladies who glittered with jewels, and tried to glitter with the acts and profound wisdom of one or two years out of school—he had seen them clasp their hands and shiver at mention of his name, and apply to him such epithets as: "Monster! Brutal Barbarian! Wretch! Vampire! Horrible creature!" and so on to the end of the chapter.

Would it not be a rare joke, the Leadville Lion thought, since all people must sooner or later know of his daring deceit, to have these high and lofty young women know, when the exposure came, that they had actually danced with Dick Turpin?

"Miss the ball?" cried the adventurer. "Never! Unless the crash comes before to-morrow night, I'll be there; and I'll give the nabobs of the town something to talk about for years to come. Ah! belles of Leadville, I don't believe I've forgotten how to play the gallant, and you shall have cause to remember me in days to come!"

His face lit up with a glow and fire like that of the old days, and he laughed mockingly.

In imagination he saw the consternation that would fall on them all when the truth was

known, and he could not resist the temptation to cover his brief career as sheriff with all possible glory.

He was preparing to go out when a messenger came to say that Raoul Legrand wished to see him.

Up to that time he had avoided the miner as much as possible, not caring to trust him with the secret of his identity; but he could not very well refuse to answer his call. Accordingly, he walked over to the jail.

Legrand bore his imprisonment without philosophy, patience or courage. He had been sullen and aggressive by turns, and had, on the whole, injured his own cause, but matters had arrived at a crisis where he felt the need of help, so he sent for the sheriff—or he supposed he had, for not once did he imagine that it was Dick Turpin.

The latter walked into the cell with the bluff greeting!

"Hello, Legrand! How are you this morning?"

"Well in body, but that's all I can say," the miner bitterly replied. "I've sent for you, Mr. Bradstreet, because you have all along given the opinion that I had no hand in shooting that man, Knowlton."

"Such is my real opinion, Mr. Legrand."

"Well, then I am placed in such a light that I must regard you as my only friend, and I need some friend badly. You have, of course, heard the news."

"What news?"

"About my trial."

"What about it?"

"Why, it's ordered for day after to-morrow."

"What?"

Dick Turpin started back in surprise and dismay. He had hoped to see Legrand proven innocent, or to rescue him, before he could be brought to trial.

"The prosecution has so notified me."

"By the fiends!" cried Dick, "how is that? Only yesterday I notified the mayor that I should not be ready to proceed against you for two weeks, or more."

"Well, I've got a letter from the prosecuting attorney in which he says that, 'with the approval of the mayor,' he shall proceed with my trial on Thursday."

"Say that you are not ready."

"I wrote him that at once, and back came an answer from the mayor, himself, in which he said that the people demanded immediate trial, and that no postponement could be allowed. But, see here," added the miner, thoughtfully, "isn't it queer that the sheriff who made the arrest should be so passed over—snubbed, as it were?"

It was queer, and the thought had been in Dick's mind ever since he heard Legrand's statement.

What did it mean?

His first theory was that he was suspected; that he had been recognized as Dick Turpin; but this idea he speedily abandoned. Clearly, if he was suspected, the authorities would not lose a moment before making his arrest.

"It's a remarkable piece of business," he replied, to the miner's last question, "and I'll see the mayor at once and find out what it means. In any case, keep up your courage, Legrand; I shall give emphatic testimony in your favor at the trial."

"Thank you, Mr. Bradstreet; you're a man I can honor and like. By the way, how is Dick Turpin?"

"He is doing fairly."

"Curse him!" Legrand fiercely exclaimed, "if I could get at him, he would have a relapse he would never get over in this world. I never harmed a human being in my life, but I could kill that black-hearted scoundrel with less pity than I should feel for a mad-dog!"

The Leadville Lion put one hand against the wall for support. He felt faint and dizzy. This man who had cursed him was the father of the woman he loved, and for him and her he, Dick Turpin, was putting his own life in jeopardy, hoping to wrest victory from inexorable fate, and win for them, and him, a happy future. He had felt himself friendless except for them, and now—now he was bitterly cursed by him who, he thought, should feel some degree of pity for him.

And yet—yet—what pity did Dick Turpin deserve?

"You are right, Legrand," he said, hoarsely, "but let me not stop here. I'll go to the mayor, and I'll save you or die in the attempt!"

And he hurriedly left the cell.

"Save me or die in the attempt!" echoed Legrand. "Well, that's pretty strong language; but if he feels that way I certainly don't object. But what can he do? I used to suppose him a power in Leadville, but he has been ridden right over in this affair."

Dick Turpin went at once to the mayor, bursting in on that official with the impetuous question:

"Why have you ordered Legrand's trial so soon? My case is not half made up against him."

"My dear Bradstreet," was the reply, "no-

body knows better than I that it is precipitate; but both the prosecuting attorney and I have been so besieged by citizens—men of high position—who insisted on an immediate trial, that we both had to yield to the clamor."

"Who are these citizens?" suspiciously asked the visitor.

The mayor named some of the foremost men of the city.

"What the dickens do they care about the case?" the supposed sheriff asked. "They are rich, proud and exclusive; Abe Knowlton was poor, humble and coarse. Why this unusual stir in his behalf? Other men get shot in Leadville, and the aristocracy don't turn a hair. Why their sudden flurry in this case?"

"Well, I'll be hanged if I know," the mayor admitted.

"Did they not give a reason?"

"Oh! they said that the good of the city required that an example be made of him, and also said that he was probably an ally of Dick Turpin."

"Could not equally strong reasons be found in the case of every alleged murderer?"

"I should say so—yes."

"Then, Mr. Mayor, I must protest against this haste. I am the most important witness in the case, and my reputation requires that the case be properly presented."

"I'm sorry, but you see I've promised the gentlemen I named that it should go on at once."

"Suppose I call on these men?"

"You can do so, if you wish; I certainly don't object."

This was enough, and Dick went to the house of the nearest of the men, who was a wealthy merchant. He expressed the views the mayor had attributed to him, and showed a good deal of feeling against Legrand; but when asked why he had made such a sudden start in this case, he hesitatingly acknowledged that his views had been shaped by a gentleman who called on him and presented the case strongly to him.

Asked who this man was, he said that he was a stranger, and that he did not even know his name, but that he was a very respectable-looking man with a heavy beard of raven-black color.

So far he had talked quite moderately, but when Dick tried to argue against undue haste, the man became excited, and held out for Legrand's immediate trial, in such a way that Dick set him down for a fanatic and went to citizen number two.

Here the former interview was almost exactly repeated. Until of late the gentleman had been but little interested in Legrand's case, but an unknown man with a heavy black beard had called on him and argued the case so strongly that he now clearly saw that the good of Leadville required that a prompt example be made of Legrand. He, too, was aggressive and unmovable.

A third and fourth citizen were visited with like results.

Dick Turpin began to be confused and puzzled.

"Here were four men, who had never before made a similar move, all shouting for the prisoner's prompt trial; and all had been led to do so by the arguments of the man with the black beard. Who was this man? None of them knew. He had been a very respectable-appearing man; one who seemed very regardful of Leadville's morals; and he had made them see as he saw—or as he wished them to see.

All this was mysterious. The man seemed absolutely to have gained a mesmeric influence over them. But there was something more. Dick Turpin clearly saw that a personal motive, not regard for public morals, was at work. The mysterious unknown aimed directly at Legrand, or, through him, at some one else. The affair had become almost weirdly mysterious.

Whose was the invisible hand at work in the case?

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WEB OF DOGM DRAWS TIGHTER.

DICK TURPIN was completely mystified. He knew of no one who would answer the description given of the man with black beard. His impression was that he had been an agent of some other person who was at the bottom of the plot.

Who was this person?

This question he met and meditated upon for some time, but without result. Naturally, his first thought had been of Jude Peterson, but there were several arguments to be used against this theory.

First, it was not Jude in person who had visited the citizens; secondly, he could conceive of no person whom the police spy would use as an agent; and, thirdly, he could not see what Jude was to gain by hastening Raoul Legrand's trial.

Next, there was the Man with a Scar. He had the will to injure the self-styled sheriff out of simple mischief, but the description of the black-bearded man did not apply to him; the work was not like his; and Dick did not believe he would employ an ally.

The situation was perplexing, mysterious, annoying and serious. If Legrand was brought in guilty, and Dick feared he would be, his execu-

tion for murder might follow as promptly as his trial. It seemed as though everything was conspiring to make the counterfeit sheriff's position more difficult and dangerous.

After long effort he decided that the tide could not be checked. The clamor for Legrand's trial was as strong as it was mysterious; the opinion and demands of the citizens could not be changed or modified. There was something almost weird about the way in which the black-bearded man had influenced them. He, an entire stranger, had come to them and, introducing a subject on which they had been wholly indifferent, had left them positive fanatics.

What was the secret of this? Had he mesmerized them; bent them to his will by unnatural powers; or was it merely the cunning of a remarkable man?

Here there was much to suggest the Man with the Scar. He was cunning, mysterious and ingenious. Was he the power behind the throne? Turpin could not decide, but, whatever was the fact, it was clear that an invisible hand was working directly to his discomfiture. The blow, he believed, was not at Legrand, but at himself.

Feeling that Legrand ought to know all, he went back to him with his report.

The miner listened somewhat apathetically. As long as they seemed determined to rush him into his grave, he cared not whether it was due to a black-bearded man, or to one with a head of fiery red. All he could do was to get good counsel and fight for his life.

"Whatever the result, sheriff," he added, "I thank you for your efforts, as one honest man may thank another."

"I'll do all I can for you, as you'll find at the trial, Legrand. Keep good courage."

"One thing I do hope," Legrand slowly continued.

"What?"

"That if these bloodthirsty wretches bring me in guilty, my execution will be delayed until after Dick Turpin is hung!"

"Probably it will," said the supposed sheriff, in a hard voice, for only a great effort enabled him to be calm.

"Can't you hurry up his execution?"

"Not while he is sick in bed with brain fever."

"When I think of that devil," continued Legrand, his hands working convulsively, "it makes my blood boil. Brain fever or not, I'd tear out his black heart if I could get at him. He came to my home, where all was peace, sunshine and happiness, and with devilish arts won our confidence. What is the result? I must go to the gallows; my Lois will die of shame and a broken heart; and my wife will be alone in her old age. Oh! what convulsion of perdition sent such a black-hearted wretch upon the earth?"

Dick Turpin stared at the speaker in speechless horror. Worse than the sentence of death to a criminal was this attack to him. Faint, dizzy and stunned, he pressed one hand to his breast, and it seemed as though the world and all it contained was tottering and crashing around him.

How he got from the cell he did not know, though he was conscious of taking an appropriate leave of his companion in a hard, steady voice; but when once in the corridor he became calm again. The jail employees were there, and he made an effort to be himself outwardly. He looked in on Meg Gregerson, and the men captured with her. They were to be tried the next day, and he intended to have the woman imprisoned for a short time, at least, so that she could be found later.

On reaching his room he found Bowie Ben awaiting him. Agreeably to his instructions, Ben had again called upon Lois Legrand. His report was favorable. The girl, though still unable to sit up, was stronger, and his words in defense of the Leadville Lion had done much to render her cheerful.

They had again talked a good deal about Dick, and her eyes had brightened when Ben expressed the opinion that the supposed sick man, when he recovered, would be able to make a compromise, and exchange his illegally-gotten money for liberty.

Lois had declared that if this was done she would go with him to the end of the world, if need be, and begin life anew.

This report had a wonderful effect on Dick Turpin. The dark clouds of his life were swept away by that most potent of suns—a pure woman's love—and he felt capable of facing all his troubles boldly. Once let Lois recover sufficiently to travel, and Legrand's trial would be a mockery which he could easily override; he would release the miner without ceremony, and, with Lois, flee where he was unknown; and where, in the light of her smile and her love, he could lead an honest life and make amends for the old, dark past.

During the day Red Kit called at the sheriff's office. She said that all was well with Sibylla and her children, and announced that Duke Hallowell and his wife had left Leadville. The latter had prevailed upon her husband to abandon his intention of killing Dick Turpin, and, if Duke did not again change his mind, they would be seen no more in Colorado.

"They wanted me to go with them," added

Kit, "but I would not. While Dick is in danger, I will not leave here."

"But you are now without friends here," remonstrated the self-styled sheriff, ignoring her last point.

"Yes, but I feel able to care for myself. I am all alone, but, for Dick's sake, I will dare even more danger than Leadville contains."

"Miss Hallock, you should try to conquer your fancy for that man. Your repentance for what you have done is all right, but Turpin is a low, brutal outlaw and—"

"Mr. Bradstreet, we will not quarrel on that point," Red Kit curtly interrupted, "but, while I live, I shall continue to love Dick. Let us say no more about that."

No more was said then, and the mountain girl soon took her departure. Turpin looked after her more kindly than usual; he saw that she had the qualities necessary to form a true woman, if she was subjected to proper influences, and more than ever he hoped she would yet return Bowie Ben's love.

He had not long been alone when he had another visitor—the Reverend Mr. Chester. This gentleman will be remembered as the feeble, aged minister who was to have married Dick and Lois, and his appearance gave the Leadville Lion a sudden idea. Would he not be a good witness at Legrand's trial? His respectability would weigh heavily with judge and jury, and might be a powerful help for the accused.

As soon as possible he approached the subject. "Yes," replied Mr. Chester, "it was because of that I came here to-day. I have been notified that the trial is soon to come off, and that my testimony will be wanted. Ah! sir, you don't know how it will pain me to testify against Legrand!"

"Against him?" cried Dick.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you mean to say that your testimony will be against him?" agitatedly demanded the Lion.

"Alas! I saw him shoot Knowlton!"

"You have not mentioned this before."

"I was confused and uncertain for a time, but I have been convinced that I did see him fire—that is, I now remember it."

"You say you were convinced. How? if I may ask."

"Well, sir, you see another witness in the case called on me, and we discussed the affair until order came out of chaos. His clear description of the affair enabled me to see again all that I saw then, as in a mirror."

"Who was this witness?"

"I don't know his name—oddly enough he did not give it—but he was a fine-looking man of middle age, with a noble forehead, intelligent face, and long, black beard!"

Dick Turpin sat staring mutely at the speaker. Again the invisible hand! Again the black-bearded man! And this time he had come to one whom Dick hoped to use as a witness for the defense, and, with his devilish arts, he had so bewitched the feeble-minded old man, that he was ready to go to court and swear to what Dick was sure was false!

CHAPTER XXV.

MEG GREGERSON'S TRIAL.

THE voice of doom seemed sounding in Dick Turpin's ears. He realized very well what Chester's defection meant. In an Eastern court it would speedily be shown that the infirm old man was hardly a competent witness, for he was really in his second childhood; but with the alert prosecution back of him in this case, the defense would not be allowed to shatter his testimony, and his eminent respectability would make his testimony a crushing blow to Legrand.

And how had it been brought about?

Not through any ordinary channel.

Again the cunning hand of the black-bearded man appeared in the game. He had visited the aged minister, and, by his mysterious arts, had convinced him that he did see what Turpin knew Chester had not seen.

"I have been convinced that I did see him fire," the old man had said, and there was the case in a nutshell.

He had seen nothing of the kind, but, while intending to be strictly honest and just, he had been worked upon through his weakened mind, and the unknown's potent, mysterious arts, to believe that he had really seen the murder committed.

"I know now who the black-bearded man is!" the Leadville Lion thought. "There is, on the face of the earth, but one man with the devilish cunning necessary for all this, and that one is the Man with the Scar!"

From that moment he never wavered in that belief. All this had been done as a blow at him, and only the Man with the Scar had reason to suspect that it would affect him. That mysterious, relentless enemy had resolved to do all he could to make the ex-road-agent's usurped position one of trouble and misery; he was cunning enough to see that in this way he could strike more severely than by immediately exposing Turpin's deceit.

The latter, however, was not ready to surrender his position, nor to yield to circumstances.

He began an earnest attempt to change Chester's mind.

A long conversation followed, but, though he succeeded in hopelessly confusing the old gentleman on minor points, he could not eradicate from his mind the belief that he had seen the shot fired.

Abandoning the attempt at last, he allowed Chester to go his way.

All Dick's anger now turned against the Man with the Scar. But for him, his position at Leadville would be almost secure. As it was, a word would ruin all, but the cunning, incomprehensible wretch saw fit to strike Dick, not directly, but through his friends—or those with whom he would have been friends.

"But I'll play him card for card!" the Lion exclaimed.

And then he sat down at his desk and rapidly wrote the following:

"\$500 REWARD!"

"The above sum will be paid in cash, by the undersigned, for information which will lead to the arrest of a man, of whom the following is a description: He is tall, slender, about sixty years of age and thin-faced; has long, white hair, keen eyes, large nose and high forehead; while on his left cheek is a scar shaped like a letter V, with the point uppermost, and nearly reaching his eye. This man is

"A DANGEROUS LUNATIC!"

Unless promptly arrested he may do great damage. All officers will search for him, and any citizen who will give information which will lead to his seizure, will receive the above reward.

"It is to be hoped he will be taken before further damage is done."

"ROBERT BRADSTREET,
"Sheriff."

Copies of this notice the writer caused to be posted at prominent places, and then every available officer was put especially on the track, with orders to hunt him down if possible. Dick had men searching already, but he now proposed to turn over every board and leaf in the city, if need be, rather than let his enemy escape.

From that moment a determined war should be waged against him, but, in truth, Turpin was not sanguine of success.

If the Man with the Scar and the black-bearded man were one, he had managed to disguise himself so well that nobody whom he had interviewed had noticed the scar.

"His devilish cunning will probably outwit me," the ex-road-agent muttered, "but, unless I can head him off, he will ruin me and those I hope to serve."

The reward thus offered stimulated many to action, but the "dangerous lunatic" was not found. Several people reported that they believed they had recently seen a man with a scar such as was described, but nothing more definite was learned.

The day and another night passed.

This brought the time of the trial of Meg Gregerson and her allies to hand, and Dick Turpin arose prepared to prosecute them to the extent of the law. He had barely finished breakfast, however, when a messenger came from the jail to say that the male prisoners had escaped.

How they had gone was a mystery. All had been confined in one cell, and the door of this had been found locked, with everything else in order. The men had disappeared completely and mysteriously.

Dick bore the news philosophically, when he learned that Meg was still there, but walked over to the jail to investigate. He had, at first, suspected treachery on the part of the jailer, for it was clear that a key had been used and the cell-door unlocked, but when he found evidence that an impression of the lock had been taken, he changed his mind.

Somebody had made a false key and liberated them.

He bore it as well as he could, but redoubled precautions around the place, and then proceeded to conduct Meg to the court-room.

Among the spectators there was Jude Peterson. He came and talked with the supposed sheriff, standing within a few feet of Meg, but not a significant glance passed between the two, and at no time during the trial did he seem to care what the result might be.

Dick soon perceived that the prisoner had the sympathies of the crowd in the court. She was dressed in a manner to help her along in this respect. Her garments were of deepest mourning, her hair was plainly arranged, and so as to heighten the sad, meek expression she had assumed.

Very unlike the old, fierce, imperious Meg did she look.

Her lawyer, who was one of the best in Leadville, came to Dick and advised him to withdraw the charge, but the latter firmly declined.

"She has the sympathies of the people," said the legal gentleman.

"Well, she hasn't got mine."

"She will be acquitted, anyway."

"I doubt it."

"We will show you."

The lawyer walked back to his place, and the trial commenced. The self-styled sheriff told his story, and the men who had assisted him on that occasion corroborated his testimony as far as their knowledge went.

Then the prisoner was allowed to make her statement, which she did, as follows:

"My name is Mrs. Margaret Adams, and I am a native of Chicago. Seven years ago I was married to Arnold E. Adams, and we left Chicago and went to New York. My husband found employment in a large business house as porter, and for two years all went well with us. Then, unfortunately for him, my husband discovered that some of the most trusted employees of the firm were robbing their employers. He came home that night and asked my advice. I told him to tell all, and he left me the following morning determined to do so.

"That night he did not return home as usual, nor did he come the following day; and when I inquired at the store I found that he had not been there after he had left me. Not to tire you, gentlemen, I will say that I never saw my poor husband afterward. He had mysteriously disappeared, and all search for him failed. I was poor, and could do but little, but I caused all possible search to be made.

"During the next year I supported myself by doing needlework. Perhaps I should say that I kept body and soul together, for that was about all that I did. My pay was very, very small; I lived in a garret, often without fire in the dead of winter; often without food or proper clothing. But the worst of all was that I watched—oh! with what eager longing!—for the husband who did not come!"

Sad and tremulous was the speaker's voice, and, at this point, she put her black-edged handkerchief to her eyes and wept. Ay, she actually shed tears; and the judge wiped his own eyes, while nearly every face in the court-room bore an expression of deep sympathy.

Dick Turpin was dumfounded.

The audacious lie was told with the pathos of a professional actress in an emotional role, and circumstances were such that he could not arise and say:

"This is all a lie! This woman is not what she says, but one Meg Gregerson, a murderess."

To say this would be to invite an investigation which might harm him more than it did Meg.

She pathetically continued:

"At last I decided that my poor husband had been abducted and murdered by the thieves he would have exposed. Heart-broken, ill and poverty-stricken, I left New York with these mourning robes upon my person, and still darker mourning in my heart.

"Finally I came to Leadville, and, a few nights ago, I met a man who asserted that he could give me news of my husband if I would obey him. The only condition he exacted then was that I should go to Coffin Gulch in men's clothing. This seemed to me a dreadful rude thing to do, but the thought of my dear, lost husband made my heart bound."

Here the judge brushed his hand across his eyes again, and Dick thought:

"The case is lost!"

"I went to the place of meeting," Meg resumed, "and was then told that the work included frightening a man who was to be decoyed there, by threatening to hang him. I protested, but in vain. The man was firm, and then he talked about my husband until I think I grew light-headed.

"Anything, anything," I thought, 'to find my husband, and end this long widowhood; to bring joy to my breaking heart.' I consented, and—but the sheriff has told the rest. I deny nothing that occurred there."

She finished with a deep sigh, and then "the Reverend Nathan Payn, of Chicago," was called to the stand. He was a stranger to Dick Turpin, but a thoroughly conscientious, honest-looking man. Asked to give his testimony, he said that he had known "Mrs. Adams" for some years, and that she had been a member of his church previous to her marriage to Mr. Adams. Then he lost trace of her, but he declared that she had been a highly-respectable, Christian woman.

There could be no doubt that this witness told the truth.

Dick Turpin smiled grimly, and under his breath he muttered: "The invisible hand has again been at work!" but when asked if he wished to cross-examine either witness, he declined.

He was not in a ceremonious Eastern court-room, and he knew that the most strenuous efforts he dared to make, would not suffice to turn the tide of sympathy from the accused.

Her counsel made a strong argument; he declared that she was a persecuted woman, who had been made the dupe of strong men; of stronger minds than hers; and that she was not mentally responsible for her share of the work at Coffin Gulch.

"Where," he sarcastically asked, "are the men who had been at the head of the plot? Where, indeed? The prosecution admits that they have escaped. Was this through negligence, or something worse? Why were these hardened criminals allowed to get away scot-free, while this weak creature of their plot—a helpless, hapless lady—is held and dragged before the bar as though misfortune were a crime?"

And with this majestic peroration the lawyer leveled a finger solemnly at the supposed sheriff, implying an unmistakable accusation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS."

As the lawyer seemed anxious for a reply, Dick Turpin calmly arose. He could not win his case without efforts he was not inclined to make—of that he was certain—and he had decided to let the whole case go to ruin, but he did not propose to have slurs cast on himself.

"Considering the high opinion which I hold for my friend, the learned attorney, I must say that I am extremely sorry that I am not good at answering riddles. He has sprung several upon us here, and as I can plainly see that they are destined to shake the world from sea to sea, by reason of their profundity, I wish I could have the first chance at them. But I am no riddle-solver, and when he asks who liberated the male prisoners, I am obliged to confess that I don't know. I hope nobody here has the bogus key in his pocket."

Here he shook his finger at the lawyer, exactly as the lawyer had done at him a moment before.

That gentleman became very red in the face.

"Do you mean to accuse me, sir?" he said.

"You? Certainly not, sir. What gave you that idea?"

Very innocent was Dick Turpin's manner, and the lawyer found himself in a passion all for nothing. He tried to laugh and look at ease, but the red hue of his face would not subside so easily.

Dick now determined to make as much of a point for himself as he could, and, knowing that he had got to accept defeat anyway, he arose and withdrew the charge against the prisoner.

Then followed cheering in court, and several people pressed forward to congratulate the "poor widow," as they called Meg. Wild Dick smiled sarcastically, and then made his way to the Reverend Mr. Payne's side.

"Are you quite sure as to Mrs. Adams's identity, sir?" he politely asked.

"Oh, yes; I remember her well."

"You had not seen her for seven years until now?"

"No, sir."

"Has she changed any?"

"Greatly. I confess that I should not have known her; but her friend recalled all the circumstances to my mind."

"What friend?"

"He did not give his name, nor have I seen him here to-day; but he was a fine-looking man of middle age, with a heavy black beard."

Again the invisible hand!

"I know him," coolly replied Turpin; not in the least surprised. "Well, of course I freely forgive Mrs. Adams, now that I know what an estimable woman she is. Glad you were here to testify, sir. Good-day!"

The self-styled sheriff left the court-room, but as he did so, found opportunity to whisper to Bowie Ben:

"Follow this woman secretly! I want to know where she takes refuge."

"All right!"

Ben answered promptly, and then his old leader strode away.

Dick was again defeated. The mere fact that Meg had escaped justice did not trouble him, but he was sorry that she was again at liberty to plot against Sibylla Marcy; and he perceived that the black-bearded man was as active as ever, determined to baffle the sheriff *pro tem.* in every possible way.

Where did the man conceal himself, or rather, how did he avoid all search made for him in his real or assumed character? Even while being searched for, he seemed to come and go freely, visiting whoever he chose, and bending their minds to suit himself.

Dick knew that Meg had been elsewhere at the time the Chicago minister had said she was a shining light in his church, yet Mr. Payne had been sincere. The same cunning eloquence which moved the citizens against Raoul Le-grand had made Payne see white where all was black.

The Man with the Scar seemed to possess more than human cunning; it was more like supernatural, devilish ingenuity.

"If I had nothing else to do," thought the adventurer, "I would put my brains directly against this fellow, but even in the midst of so many cares and so much peril I defy him; and it may be that I shall score a point myself before the game is ended."

Evening!

The mayor's house was aglow with light, for it was the occasion of the grand ball. The eagerly-anticipated occasion had come, and though the guests would rise the next morning weary, pale, beset with headaches, and in such vicious temper that they would make life a burden to all others, they were for the night as light-hearted and gay as though care and trouble were things never heard of in real life.

Dick Turpin was there in faultless evening dress. The real Bradstreet had fought his way

to polite society by perseverance, skill, his honest nature and his good looks. True, he was only a sheriff, but society lines were not tightly drawn in Leadville, and he had made himself a favorite.

His counterfeit, who had for once put all care aside, looked at the guests and smiled sarcastically.

The situation was eminently enjoyable.

There were the wealthy business men who would have been more wealthy had Dick Turpin, of Leadville never been on the road.

There were the jeweled young ladies, prouder than their fathers; for they had been born to wealth, instead of working long and hard for it; young butterflies they, fresh from school, with a rigid regard for new styles of pronunciation and a lofty contempt for the old; the same fastidious creatures, with French shrugs of their shapely shoulders—Frenchmen would never have recognized the shrugs, unless they were labeled—had called Dick Turpin a monster, ruffian, brute, and countless other names.

For one night the Lion of Leadville was the associate of these people, and he resolved that when the exposure came, and all Leadville rung with the news of his daring deceit, these people should have occasion to remember this evening.

When dancing began, he was not without a partner, nor was he without one at any time. He selected the richest, most lovely and most exclusive, and he never seemed to require rest.

It was said that night that Sheriff Bradstreet had never been so gay before; that he had never before danced so gracefully; and the belles of the occasion were surprised at his sudden skill in making fine speeches.

The time might come when they would say that he bewitched them, but they then thought that it would be an event to flirt with this handsome young man, if he was only a sheriff; so they met him half-way with tender speeches which they might some time remember with consternation.

What would they think when they knew that their graciousness had been bestowed on the Lion of Leadville, the outlaw whom they had pronounced a brute and monster!

It was not until a late hour that the ex-road-agent felt like missing any part of the dancing.

He then went to one side and stood looking on. Perhaps ten minutes had passed, when a servant brought him a card. He took it and read the inscription:

"COUNT IVAN ROMISCHOFF,
"St. Petersburg, Russia."

And in one corner was the single line in pencil:

"May I see you a moment on official business?"

"The gentleman is waiting in a private room, sir. Shall I conduct you there?" the servant asked.

"At once, if you please."

Turpin was soon at the private room, and in the strong light a slender, elegant-looking gentleman arose to receive him. The stranger seemed to be a man of middle age, was dark-complexioned, with black hair and a short, black beard, and wore eye-glasses. Dick remembered having seen him before during the evening, but had not particularly noticed him.

He bowed politely.

"I am Count Romischoff," he said, with a slight accent. "You are, I think, the Sheriff Bradstreet?"

"Yes, sir," Dick quietly replied.

"I fear I have interrupted you."

"Not in the least, count."

"And I can have a few minutes of your time?"

"Willingly."

"Thank you, Sir Sheriff."

"Speak on!"

"I suppose you do not remember ever seeing me before?"

Dick Turpin laughed shortly, harshly.

"You are wrong," he said, in a deep voice.

"You may masquerade among others, and wear your disguises, but me you cannot so easily deceive. You are the Man with the Scar!"

A mocking smile swept over the pretended count's dark face.

"So I am recognized. Well, I am not sorry, for I called you here on purpose to reveal my identity."

"You are very kind."

Dick spoke ironically, and his manner was as composed as that of the strange man before him. He had met with a great surprise, but the strength of his character now revealed itself, and where a weaker man would have been excited and confused, he was like a man of marble.

"You are cutting a wide swath in yonder ball-room," said the man of mystery, with a dark smile.

"I'm not the only one given to that amusement. You, as the black-bearded man, have accomplished some wonders."

"And made your position as sheriff unpleasant?"

"Yes."

"Also, you have hunted for me in vain?"

Soft, yet sneering, was the man's voice, but Dick Turpin coolly replied:

"In vain until now. At last I have you in my power, and you shall not escape!"

"How can you prevent it?"

"In several ways. For instance, I make bold to say that there is no quicker revolver-shot in Leadville than I."

"But your revolver is empty."

"Wrong! It holds six charges."

"I'll wager money there is not one in it. Draw, and see!"

Almost mechanically, Dick Turpin obeyed. He was amazed to find every chamber in the cylinder was empty, but the Man with the Scar laughed mockingly.

"You see how it is, boy. In dealing with me, even lead ceases to be a feature or a charm. You are powerless!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

HIS INEXORABLE FOE.

DICK TURPIN was for a moment amazed, for he had carefully loaded the weapon just before leaving home, and had not drawn it from his pocket since, but he now looked at the Man with the Scar, and spoke with a degree of fierceness:

"This is your work!"

"It is," was the cool reply. "By means of magic, I drew the cartridges from the cylinder."

"Nonsense! You picked my pocket, and then replaced the revolver."

"Right, young man. While you flirted with those bread-and-butter young women, I abstracted the revolver, got rid of the bullets, and then replaced your toy. You see, I wanted to talk with you, and I wished those lumps of lead out of the way."

"What have you to say?"

"For one thing, that your scheme to control Leadville will not work. I am watching you, baffling certain plans, and, when you most desire success, you will find me at your elbow to foil and unmask you; to say to the world: This is Dick Turpin, of Leadville."

"What do you suppose I will be doing all the while?" coolly demanded the Lion.

"Struggling like a fly in a web."

"You don't seem to have much faith in my ability."

"I do not underrate you. Compared to common men, you are no fool; but when you meet this brain of mine, you are like a child."

The speaker tapped his head with easy confidence of manner.

"Well," replied Dick, "suppose we let the future take care of itself and speak of the past. You remember our last interview before we came to Colorado?"

"Yes."

"And what you then claimed to know?"

"I told you that, if I would, I could prove the marriage of your mother to your father; also that I could prove innocent of the crime for which you were sentenced to the Illinois State Prison. All this was true. I know where your mother was married—the records are still there—and who were the witnesses to the ceremony. I could, if I would, establish your parentage beyond the least shadow of doubt, but I will not."

Cold and even was the man's voice, and his dark face seemed incapable of expressing feeling.

Dick Turpin was equally calm outwardly, but his face had grown pale as death.

"And the other matter?" he asked, in a hard voice.

"The murder?"

"Ay, the murder."

"Although I had no share in that deed, I can name the real murderer, and by so doing, can clear your name. I can, but I will not!"

"This is what you told me before."

"Yes; and you tried to force me to tell. Ha! ha!"

The Man with the Scar laughed in a mocking, hollow, mirthless way.

"You escaped me then," Turpin replied, "but this time it will be different."

"This time? Do you mean that you are beligerently inclined?"

"Since you so express it, I am."

"You had better curb your passions," was the dry observation. "I have you in a net. I have only to go before the guests assembled inside and say: 'This is Dick Turpin!' and you are a doomed man."

The Leadville Lion bit his lips fiercely. He knew that this was the truth. The Man with the Scar held the reins of power, and with so much at stake he could not afford to anger him too much.

"At least, we may have an understanding," he said, after a pause. "I should never have been Dick Turpin but for you. I heard that you were with the band, of which Burke Broutt was then leader, so I came here and joined the band. You had just left, but, hoping you would return, I remained with them. I found, at last, the peace which had come to me nowhere else. There, the hands of all men were not against me, for the band was composed of whole-souled men, whatever their character. Step by step I floated on until I became their leader, but I owe it to you. If I am an outlaw, you are responsible."

The Man with the Scar smiled serenely.

"Thank you; you make me happy. It has been the one great study of my life to make you miserable. I might have killed you, years ago, but I knew that I could secure a most emphatic revenge by allowing you to live. Now, however, I am an old man, and I shall soon wind up your career. My chance has come at last. Situated as things are here with you, it would be a great blow if, just as victory seemed in your grasp, I should hurl your plans to ruin, and send you to the scaffold, would it not?"

His quiet air of satisfaction made Dick Turpin long to start forward and seize him by the throat, but he controlled the impulse and answered:

"Incomprehensible man! what is the cause of this persistent persecution?"

"Hatred!" was the laconic reply.

"Hatred of my parents! Man, what did they ever do to you?"

"Well, boy, you shall know before you die; it is a short story and can soon be told."

"And because you hated them, you hunt me as a hound does a rabbit. Did I ever wrong you?"

"The young of vipers must necessarily be a viper."

Dick Turpin stood looking at the Man with the Scar with emotions of a strange and conflicting nature. To him he owed a ruined life. True, fate had also been against him; the world had been eager to wrongfully accuse him, and to drive him to a path of crime; but all was primarily due to this demon in human shape who stood there and exulted over his work.

Yet, the ex-road-agent could not touch him then. To seize him would be to lead the villain to expose Dick Turpin's identity; while, if he had been inclined to shoot him down, as he richly deserved, the last hope of clearing up the mystery of his mother's marriage would be lost.

The Lion of Leadville was helpless. He who had been a resistless power around the neighborhood for months was now as helpless as—to use the man's own comparison—a fly in a spider's web.

The Man with the Scar watched Dick closely during the pause which followed, and a complacent smile stole over his face as he saw the younger man's perturbed expression.

"Why have you called me here?" finally asked Turpin, almost sullenly.

"Merely for a friendly chat, and for a few other things. You have offered a reward for the Man with the Scar—a dangerous lunatic, ha! ha!—and forced me into this disguise. Can you see any signs of the scar now? Ah! my head is an old and a long one; I am not slow at the disguise business. But, boy, you must call off your bloodhounds."

"I will, when you cease meddling with my affairs."

"What do you mean?"

"To-day, my case against Meg Gregerson fell through. This was your work. You secured false keys to the jail—your devilish ingenuity seems unlimited—and not only released the woman's accomplices, but concocted for her the fiction she told at the trial; and you saw the Chicago minister and made him believe that Meg was one of his old-time church-members."

"True," was the calm reply.

"But this is not the worst. You have stirred up public opinion against Raoul Legrand, going among prominent men in disguise, of which a long, black beard was a leading feature, and making them see as you wished. What fiendish ingenuity you possess I don't know, but you have put an honest, innocent man in peril of the gallows."

"True!"

Cool and unmoved was the reply, and Dick Turpin clinched his hands nervously.

"When you go forth and create a reaction in his favor, I'll call off the police I have set on your track—not before!" he fiercely exclaimed.

Nonchalantly the Man with the Scar shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will; let your bloodhounds search for me. It is dollars to cents that they don't find me, and, if they do, I shall say: 'Gentlemen, I am not insane; nobody is more level-headed than I, and, for proof of it, I refer you to my very dear friend, Sheriff Bradstreet, alias Dick Turpin, of Leadville!'"

The ex-road-agent's gaze fell. His case was hopeless; he was in the power of this man. A word from him and ruin would come to the so-called sheriff. For a few moments the Leadville Lion felt helpless and hopeless. Why continue to struggle against such odds? Why fight a losing fight?

Then fierce resentment against this cool scoundrel arose within him, and he hoarsely replied:

"You shall have your way in one thing, but mark what I say: If you hound me to the wall, I will not suffer alone. In some way or other, I will find means of striking you in return, and you shall go down to ruin and disgrace with me!"

"To that I readily agree—if you can work your will. Surely, I ought not to deny you so slight a pleasure as that."

"Sneer on; the tide may yet turn."

"A very original remark. But, by the way, will you not be missed from the ball-room? The

hour of winding up the festivities draws near, and those fair creatures will miss your graceful waltzing and pretty speeches. Return to them, and play the gallant; make the most of your one evening in polite society. There! there! not a word more. I will not stay to discuss old issues. From now you will see me daily, and we can talk any time. Go to the darlings of the ball-room, and set their yearning hearts at rest!"

With this cold sneer the mysterious man locked his arm within Turpin's, and drew him from the room.

"Remember," he added, "I am now Count Romischoff. I have a hundred other names, but here in Leadville I am a noble Russian. Now, boy, go and dance, and let me see your gallant speeches brighten the fawn-like eyes of the dainty belles of this happy night!"

Dick Turpin obeyed, and from then until the end of the evening he missed no dance, while his gayety, his politeness and tender speeches surprised and charmed his partners. As Nero played the fiddle when Rome was burning, so Dick Turpin danced when the air seemed black with speedy ruin and disgrace!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BROUGHT TO TRIAL.

DICK TURPIN arose in the morning, after a brief, but quiet, slumber, with much about which to think. He had accomplished his object in going to the ball; he had danced with the very young ladies who had previously pronounced him a barbarian, brute and monster; so far his triumph was complete.

But when he thought of the Man with the Scar there was little of triumph in his mind.

His old enemy clearly held the reins of power, and he might at any time see fit to use this power to crush the counterfeit sheriff. Truly, Dick Turpin was beset with trouble and danger, and a weaker man would have at once taken to flight and left Leadville forever behind.

Not so with Dick Turpin.

Loving Lois Legrand as he did, he was stubbornly resolved to remain, win her for his wife, and show her through the coming years that he was not as bad as men reported him; and, though Raoul Legrand had cursed him bitterly, he was determined to save him or sacrifice his own life.

As for the Man with the Scar, he would not resign himself to defeat while a hope remained. If the villain would delay until Lois was able to bear travel, he would release Raoul secretly, and take Lois and flee from Colorado. Had he been alone there he would have wasted no time in diplomacy in dealing with the arch-plotter, but, showing an iron hand at once, would have tried to kidnap and bear him away.

Perhaps he would yet be able to do that; in any case, he would keep a bold front and fight his enemy to the last.

On this day Legrand was to be tried, but the hour was set so late that Dick had two visitors before he went to the court-room. The first was Red Kit. She reported that all was well with Sibylla and her children, and that, though a close watch had been kept, there was no sign that her enemies had gained a clew to her hiding-place.

When this report was made Red Kit seemed uneasy for a few moments, and then abruptly said:

"Sheriff, I've something to say to you."

"Go on!"

"You will not be angry?"

"No."

"I want to again ask permission to go and take care of Dick Turpin!"

"Miss Hallock, why will you bring up this subject?"

"Because I can't help it," Kit replied, her voice trembling. "I am now all alone here. Father and mother have gone, and I have no one to—care for, but Dick. How would you feel, sir, if there was some one whom you loved, sick and in trouble, and you could not go to her?"

Dick Turpin started. The girl little suspected how true a barb she had sped. He was slow with his reply.

"I think you are doing wrong to cling to this outlaw so, Miss Hallock."

"Outlaw or not," cried the girl, with a flash of spirit, "he is as noble a man as lives!"

"Well, when he recovers, do you suppose he will have an equally high opinion of you?"

Red Kit's face grew grave, and her lips trembled.

"He will hate me; he can't help it," she replied; "but that is no reason why I should desert him. I have been guilty of the most infamous wrong that woman ever did; let me now go to him and show my remorse as much as I can. Let me make amends for my sin."

"Are you willing to nurse him back to life so that he can marry Lois Legrand?"

A long-drawn, tremulous sigh escaped the girl's lips.

"It will be for him to choose, so far as I am concerned. Should he ever be a freeman again, and feel so bitter toward me as to curse me, I would see him married to her, if it was his wish, and then I would go away—somewhere, anywhere—and wish him well!"

Dick Turpin shaded his face with his hand for several seconds and sat in utter silence. When he looked up his face was calm and unreadable.

"It shall be as you say!"

"And I may go to him?"

"If you wish."

The light of a great joy flashed to Red Kit's face, and she fell on her knees at the supposed sheriff's feet.

"Heaven bless you!" she cried. "May all good gifts be yours all through your life. I cannot reward you, but I will pray for you."

Dick hurriedly raised her to her feet.

"Say no more, Miss Hallock, and—I am full of business to-day. I will write you permission to go to the sick man. Tom, the colored man hired by me, stays there nights; you can remain at such hours as you see fit during the day."

He sent her away as soon as possible, and then sat looking after her in grave meditation.

"What a strange thing is the human heart, and how strange is woman! Red Kit could betray the man she loved for revenge, and now she wishes to nurse him back to life, even though he married her rival. I ought to hate the girl, but if I could do anything to turn her love to Bowie Ben, I would do it. He is a fine fellow, and would make her happy. I wish it might come about."

At this moment Bowie Ben himself entered the office.

"Hal! what news, comrade?" Dick asked.

"I've visited Miss Legrand."

"To-day?"

"Yes."

"You made an early call."

"So I did, but I wanted to get back in time to hear Legrand's trial. I should not have gone to-day, but Miss Legrand intimated that she wanted me to come particularly. I now know her reason."

"What was it?"

"I had encouraged her to hope that the so-called Dick Turpin would soon recover consciousness, and she had a note prepared which she directed me to give to Dick Turpin as soon as he recovered his senses, and it would be safe."

"Have you it now?" Dick eagerly asked.

"Yes."

"Give it to me quickly!"

Bowie Ben obeyed, and Turpin hurriedly tore open the envelope and read the note. It was as follows:

"MY DEAR, DEAR RICHARD:—

"We are all in great trouble, but day follows night, and the sun is sure to fall sooner or later upon our lives. I have been ill, but strength is returning to me, and I shall soon be well. Only that you are in trouble I should be content; but I feel strong hope. Be you of good cheer, too, for the sunshine will come at last."

"My darling, do not have one useless fear about me. Were you ten times a Dick Turpin, I would love you still. I know that you are noble and good at heart, and nothing shall turn my love from you. A woman's love is not for a day only, but for life and eternity. Do not have any fear that I will let slanderers poison my mind. Soon, very soon, I shall be able to get to Leadville, and then I will see you, if love can turn back prison-bolts. Until I do see you, think of me and love me, even as I shall love you."

"Your devoted bride,

"Lois."

Ah! was it the Lion of Leadville who let that precious paper fall from his hands and looked at his ally with eyes filled with happy tears? Was it Dick Turpin, of Leadville, who was weeping like a woman?

He took Bowie Ben's hand and pressed it fervently.

"Bless you, Ben; bless you! Never was there better friend than you, and never did friend bring more joyful news."

The messenger's face was bright with sympathetic pleasure.

"I felt sure that it was good news, captain, and I congratulate you. Miss Legrand is a noble woman, and second only to Red Kit, in my opinion. Excuse me, captain, for of course you can't forget what Kit has done—"

"I can forget all; I am too happy now to hold resentment. Ben, if you can win Kit for your wife, my best wishes will go with you both."

Ben sighed and shook his head.

"I have but little hope."

"Persevere! Wonders can thus be accomplished."

"Well, I certainly intend to persevere."

"As you and Red Kit will both be on duty at the sick man's bedside, there can be no harm in letting her know that you and the 'negro' nurse are one."

Ben opened his lips to say that Kit already knew it, but he felt guilty because he had so long concealed the fact. So he thanked Dick and said nothing more.

They could delay no longer, for it was time to go to the court-room.

In due time Raoul Legrand was placed at the bar to be tried for his life. He was calm and dignified, making a good appearance, and though the people of Leadville were so strongly against him, was not without friends. All of his fellow-employees at the Gold Bug Mine had

come to the trial, and nothing could make them believe him guilty. They, however, were humble miners, while Legrand's enemies were among the richest men of the city.

Dick Turpin saw "Count Romischoff" among the spectators, but he sat well back in the room and seldom showed any interest in the case.

The first witness was he who was called Sheriff Bradstreet, and he told the story of the eventful evening at Legrand's house. Nothing could have been clearer than his narrative, except that he confessed that he had neither seen a revolver fired nor heard anything of the kind. This fact he explained, however, by saying that all was confusion in the room, and, in the uproar and excitement this fact was not strange.

He, however, strongly advanced the opinion that Abe Knowlton had been shot by "Dick Turpin," whereupon the Man with the Scar smiled grimly.

It was seldom a witness tried to cast suspicions of murder upon himself.

The prosecuting attorney was angry at seeing an officer give testimony calculated to help the prisoner, and he took the witness in hand.

"I must confess that I am as much at a loss to understand this affair as you say you are. Who shot out the light in the room?"

"I suppose it was Dick Turpin, though I did not see it done."

"Turpin was standing in the hall?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Legrand, also?"

"Yes, sir."

"Might it not have been Legrand who shot out the light?"

"Possibly."

"In that case, it would prove that he was very hostile to the arresting party."

"Yes," calmly replied the witness, "and it would also prove that he did not shoot Knowlton, for only one chamber of his revolver was discharged."

The lawyer scowled blackly.

"See here, you are not the counsel for defense!" he exclaimed. "You will confine yourself to your testimony. Now, when Turpin fired, his bullet cut the wire which suspended the lamp, which then fell, knocked you down, rolled to the floor and exploded. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what I want to know is, how did Dick Turpin get back there to the exploded lamp, and get so badly burned—worse than you, when one would naturally suppose he would have been trying to escape?"

There was no suspicion in his voice, and the counterfeit sheriff calmly replied:

"My theory is that, seeing his bullet had failed to break the lamp, and believing that it would continue to give light, he sprung forward to seize it, intending to complete his work. Possibly he would have flung it out of the window, but he became wrapped in the flames. I consider that he saved my life, for, as he stooped toward the lamp, the flame flashed up and caught him first."

"And then you rolled him in the blanket?"

"Yes, sir."

"You ran a good deal of risk for an outlaw."

"We wanted Dick Turpin for the gallows," was the laconic reply, which made Romischoff smile again.

"Well, Mr. Bradstreet, you did well; that I don't deny. But do you suppose that, while you were rolling Turpin in the blanket, he coolly took his time and shot Mr. Knowlton?" sarcastically asked the lawyer.

"I suppose nothing of the kind," curtly answered the witness. "I have once distinctly said that I believe Knowlton started forward to seize Turpin just as the latter was hurrying toward the lamp, and that Turpin then shot him."

"Well, if Turpin shot him, where is the revolver with which he did it?"

"It mysteriously disappeared, like the one I held in my hand when the lamp knocked me down. Somebody evidently stole these two weapons."

"Might not this have been Legrand?"

"No. He was at the other side of the room."

The prosecuting attorney did not see fit to fish for more information, but called Mr. Chester, the aged minister to the stand. This feeble old man then proceeded to repeat the testimony which we have heard him give to the sheriff, which was to the effect that he actually saw Legrand shoot Knowlton.

The lawyer for the defense took the witness in hand; in a few minutes he had admitted that he was not sure he had seen anybody fire a revolver until a stranger called upon him and convinced him that he *had*; and the witness, old and feeble-minded, became so hopelessly tangled up that he would answer "yes" to anything.

At this point the judge interfered.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MAN WITH THE SCAR DRAWS THE NET TIGHTER.

A MURMUR of indignation, directed toward the counsel for the defense, had been running through the room. Nine out of ten of the witnesses were bitterly against Legrand, and Mr. Chester was the only important witness for the

prosecution. It was known that he was so infirm mentally that his testimony had no business in court, but they sincerely believed that he had seen what he stated, and were ready to assault the lawyer who dared to confuse him.

The judge was of the same opinion, and, despite all protests on the part of the defense, he declared that the old minister's testimony should stand, and that he should not be cross-examined further.

This remarkable decision was greeted with cheers from the Leadville people, and groans from the miners who favored Legrand, whereupon the latter faction was threatened with ejection from the room.

The next witness was a doctor, who swore that the fatal bullet was of the size which fitted Legrand's revolver.

Next followed such members of the sheriff's party as were of an opinion suitable to the interests of the prosecution.

The testimony for the defense was properly considered weak. Legrand's wife swore that he had fired one shot from his revolver at a night-bird just at twilight, and the most was made of the other witnesses. The supposed sheriff was recalled, and he gave emphatic testimony against the theory of the prosecution, much to the wrath of the spectators; and one man audibly observed that they would have a new sheriff in a short time.

No one had a doubt as to what the verdict would be, but Legrand's lawyer had made the most of his poor material. He had a good point by referring to the unknown man who had called on Chester and convinced him that he had seen what the minister had not before suspected he had seen.

Who was this man? Why did not the defense produce him? They claimed to know nothing about him, yet, after influencing a witness, this person suddenly disappeared from view. Why did he not make himself known? Why was he in hiding?—why, unless he had been an indirect promoter of perjury, and was afraid to appear?

The Man with the Scar complacently caressed his false beard during these remarks. He had no intention of "appearing," and he knew his work could not be undone in such a prejudiced court. Once, and once only, did he meet Dick Turpin's gaze. The latter's face was full of threatening fire, but the self-styled Russian smiled again.

He knew that Dick dared not unmask him.

The verdict was reached at last.

"Guilty!"

Then followed the sentence.

"To be hanged until dead, one week from to-day!"

Raoul Legrand bowed his head. He was pale, but calm, and walked from the court-room with a firm step. Whatever he had received of injustice on this occasion, he would have justice at a higher court, when the great Judge listened to his plea.

The supposed sheriff took him back to jail, and then went to his office. Nothing about the matter had surprised him, but he was shown more plainly in what a precarious position he stood.

The coming week would settle the whole matter one way or the other. He had fully decided that Legrand must be rescued from jail by him and Bowie Ben, and only a week remained in which to do it. This was enough time, though, if Lois improved fast enough to be able to leave the vicinity. The chances were that she would, and then, if he could avoid the Man with the Scar, they would flee to a safer place.

Here, however, came in a great danger. Was it possible to avoid the Man with the Scar? He had declared that just when Dick's future hung trembling in the balance, he would step forward and dash his hopes to ruin.

He had the will to do this, and was remarkably cunning, and the Leadville Lion's way would lie where dangers yawned at every step.

He intended, though, to meet craft with craft, and to try and outwit his enemy.

In the meanwhile, the real Sheriff Bradstreet was approaching the crisis of his fever. The end was near; he would soon die, or regain consciousness; and then the usurper would be in fresh trouble.

Hemmed in on every side, he could only hope that Lois would recover rapidly, and that he would be able to pass through all the dangers which beset him.

He was considering all this when a stepsound came at the door, and he looked up and saw the Man with the Scar, otherwise Count Romischoff. The audacity of the man did not surprise him, for he was accustomed to it, but it aroused his anger.

The visitor nodded coolly, and helped himself to a chair.

"How do you find yourself to-day, sheriff?"

"Well!" was the curt reply.

"Did the trial please you?"

"Immensely."

"I am charmed to hear it, but how about Legrand? Will he enjoy hanging?"

"Man," said the ex-road-agent, with sudden fire, "are you so utterly inhuman that you will let an innocent man go to the gallows, merely to spite me?"

Romischoff paused to light a cigar, which he

did with exasperating slowness and nonchalance. He then languidly, indifferently replied:

"Yes."

"Take care that you don't overreach yourself."

"Thanks!"

Dick Turpin glared the wrath he would do no good by expressing. Was this cold, sneering man human? He could hardly believe it, for there is a limit to human depravity, and to Romischoff's there appeared to be none.

"What is your real name?" he suddenly asked.

"Beardsley."

Prompt, quiet and indifferent was the reply.

"You are merely laughing at me."

"No. You ought to have some name to call me by, so let it be Beardsley. Romischoff is too barbarous, though it is my name in public. This reminds me to say, I have taken up my residence at the hotel in some style, as the Russian count. I want you to recognize me as an honored friend whom you knew in the East."

"Publicly?"

"Of course."

Dick hesitated for a moment, and then sullenly replied:

"As you will. I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I'll swear you're Alexander of Russia, if you ask."

"Don't! Somebody might dynamite me. There is one favor more you can do me—a slight one. To-morrow I shall install at the house my niece, daughter of my only and loved sister; and I want you to recognize her as you do me. That is, announce her publicly as your friend. To-morrow I shall have an open carriage and two horses at my door, and in this carriage, you, and I, and my niece, will ride through Leadville from pole to pole. Eh?"

"Who is the lady?" curtly asked Turpin.

Beardsley carelessly knocked the ashes from his cigar.

"Meg Gregerson!"

"Meg?"

"Yes."

"Never, by my life! never!" the Leadville Lion hotly replied.

"Then she and I will ride alone to the mayor's, and tell him that you are not Bradstreet, but Dick Turpin!"

The words were slowly spoken, with no sign of passion, but there was a hard, inexorable inflection which told how much in earnest the Man with the Scar was.

"But think of my public trouble with the woman," urged Turpin.

"You can say that you were mistaken, can't you?"

Dick did not answer at once, but sat in gloomy silence. He could not see what Beardsley was to gain by all this, and he decided that it was merely to humiliate and worry him further. But, after all, what did it matter? At this stage of affairs he could ride with pauper or king, friend or foe, and it would all be one in a few days. Moreover, if he yielded, it would give the Man with the Scar a still higher estimate of his power, and might throw him off his guard.

He decided to yield, but, for effect, only did so after considerable argument.

This point settled, Beardsley thanked him and took his departure with the same careless indifference he had shown during the interview. Dick Turpin looked after him with a dark frown.

"Will nothing content you, demon? So I must ride through all Leadville with you and Meg Gregerson? Well, so be it; the more the merrier; but if I don't get a blow at you inside of a week, I am willing to lose the game. You have run far enough on your career, and if you persist in forcing me to the gallows, and I can head you off in no other way, I reckon a bullet will do it!"

In the mean while, the Man with the Scar walked on until he reached a certain house which he located after some hesitation. He rung the bell, and to the woman who answered it, and looked at him suspiciously, said:

"I am from Jude Peterson, and want to see Meg."

The words proved a sufficient passport; he was admitted to the sitting-room, and Meg soon joined him there. She looked at him with suspicion, however, for he did not appear like the kind of messenger Jude would naturally send.

"Have you business with me?" she abruptly asked.

"Yes."

"What is the message?"

"There is none. I took the liberty of using Jude's name as a passport, but the matter is solely between you and me."

Meg looked alarmed. She was in hiding, and, at every turn, expected a blow from the supposed sheriff.

"I want nothing to do with you!" she declared, taking a step toward the door.

"Stop!" he directed. "Will you refuse to hear me if I assure you it is to your advantage to listen?"

"How can that be?"

"Suppose that we hate the same man, and that, by striking him, we work together and accomplish a double object?"

"Do you mean—"

"That the sheriff is our mutual enemy? I do, and it is in my power to humble him to the dust. I know you and your grudge against him, and though I cannot reveal my own feud with him, our interests are mutual. Come, shall we combine and crush him?"

Meg quickly held out her hand.

"Yes," she hissed; "anything to bring him to ruin!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LION SHOWS HIS TEETH.

SHORTLY after Beardsley's departure Dick Turpin received a telegram directed to "Sheriff Bradstreet." It was brief, and of commonplace nature, yet it was the cause of long and careful meditation on his part. When he had settled the matter to his satisfaction, he sat down and rapidly wrote one line on a piece of paper.

Though not a direct answer to the telegram, it bore on that subject, and a grim smile passed across his face as he read it over.

"We'll see what that will do!" he muttered, and then sent the message off.

Next he went to the hospital. The real Sheriff Bradstreet was once more becoming a factor in the case. Unless he died at the crisis of his fever he would soon recover consciousness, and then the city would not be a safe place for Dick Turpin, of Leadville. Consequently, the impostor was watching him closely. The first signs of approaching consciousness, or, rather, of the turn of his illness, must be the signal for the Leadville Lion to go.

Even Lois's sickness would be no excuse for him to remain longer.

On this occasion he found Bradstreet looking better than before. His fever had wrapped his mental powers in oblivion, but it had not been such a severe strain on his system as such fevers often are. He looked bad enough, surely, but Dick's inexperienced eyes could see favorable symptoms, and nobody there was more pleased than Dick Turpin.

"What is your opinion, doctor?" he asked.

"Favorable, Mr. Bradstreet; decidedly favorable. Of course there is a chance that he may go off at the crisis, but I expect to see him recover. His bodily condition is excellent, and will help him to turn the corner all right. I think we may count on his recovery, sheriff."

"When will the crisis come, in your opinion?"

"I set it forty-eight hours hence."

"Two days! By that time all will be settled."

The doctor did not suspect the double meaning of the last sentence, and he quickly replied:

"Yes, that will settle it."

The Lion of Leadville went away. Two days in which to wrest victory from the forces which threaten him with defeat. The Man with the Scar must be blocked; Legrand released, and Lois notified as to the truth. His prayer was that she might gain even more rapidly.

Mechanically, his steps turned toward Bowie Ben's lodgings, and he was soon closeted with his ally. To him he explained the situation, and detailed his plans. On the next night they would throw off the mask and replace Raoul Legrand, and then the prisoner, Lois and Dick would flee rapidly northward.

"To-morrow," Turpin added, "I will see Lois. I would have waited longer, but circumstances are such that it cannot be. I must see her, and learn if she is still willing to trust her fortunes to my care."

"There can be no doubt of that," Ben replied.

"I believe you are right," Dick agreed, thinking of the loving letter he had received.

"Miss Legrand is a noble woman."

"Thank you, Ben; your words make me happy. But, let us speak of your own affairs. What of Red Kit and yourself?"

Ben's face became grave.

"There is nothing new."

"You are not losing hope, I trust."

"It is clear to me, captain, that she still feels as she did toward you, and that she don't care for me."

"Hope on, Ben! Never give up the ship."

Ben brushed his hand nervously across his face.

"I am not sure that I shall try further."

"Not try further?"

"Captain, there can be only ill feeling between you and Kit—would it not cut me off from you?"

"Not in the least, my dear fellow. Red Kit has a good heart—I will say that though she has done me great injustice—and, I feel sure, would make you a devoted wife. I am sure I wish her well."

"But would one brought up as she has been; who has thus spent the years of her life during which one's character is formed; would she really make a good wife, and be content with plain, humdrum scenes?"

These words were slowly spoken, and Turpin looked at the speaker in surprise.

"Ben, is your loyalty to her wavering?"

"No, sir!" hastily and emphatically replied the young man; "but I do want your candid opinion on the subject. You know what Red Kit has been; what a wild, saucy, thoughtless girl she was at the cave; and the question

naturally arises, would she, as a wife, be practical, contented and devoted to home?"

"I answer, most emphatically, yes! She belongs to a class of women who are like bubbling champagne to the outside world, and a limitless well of tenderness and devotion to those who know their hearts. Such women are rare; you will not see more than one in a hundred; but Red Kit is of that class."

Bowie Ben grasped his leader's hand.

"Thank you, captain, you give me courage to go on. You are a good friend."

"And what shall I say about your aid with Lois? But for you I could not have learned her present opinion of me, and she would have remained in doubt and misery. Your aid has been invaluable."

"Don't mention it, captain."

"I am once more looking forward to a peaceful, happy future," said Turpin, thoughtfully.

"I am not naturally a rascal. You don't know what troubles have conspired to make me what I am, Ben. Besides the Man with the Scar, all the world has seemed to be against me. I tried as hard as any man to be honest, but, wherever I went, misfortune followed me. Suspicious fell on me when I was wholly innocent; I was accused of misdemeanors of which I knew nothing; I was called a thief and forger, when not one cent of money went dishonestly to my pocket; trusted friends betrayed me; and when nothing else went wrong, the Man with the Scar drifted into my life to poison men's minds against me. Despite this, my hands were clean until I joined the band. You know how I came there—it was to find the Man with the Scar. He had gone, and finding the only peace of my life with the band, I drifted into the whirlpool like a chip on running water. But, Ben, I have not a dollar of money obtained on the road; what I took from the rich I gave to the poor."

Again Ben gave his hand.

"I know, captain," he simply said.

"A change is at hand; what will it be?"

"For the better, I am sure."

"Time will tell."

The speaker abruptly rose, said good-night, and left the room and the house.

A deep melancholy had fallen upon him.

If there was light in the future it did not yet show itself, and he walked in darkness and gloom.

Enemies were all about him, and danger threatened him at every step. How soon the blow might fall he did not know, but, at all times, he walked in the shadow of the impending peril. It was so near as to be ever visible; so distinct as to be almost palpable.

And the shadow grew darker, more threatening; it came nearer, and stalked by his side with hostile gestures and malignant eyes.

Unconsciously his steps turned toward the hospital, but he paused within sight of the walls. There lay the man whose place he had usurped. He would soon, Dick hoped, be entirely well. Then what would he say of him who had filled his place for awhile?

"He shall not say I neglected his interests when considering my own!" exclaimed the Lion aloud.

He then thought of Sibylla, and turned toward her new quarters. In his heart he felt that she was Robert Bradstreet's legal wife, and, though he could not account for the latter's desertion of her and her children, he was anxious that she should be safe and well when the real sheriff resumed his position.

When he reached the house where he had placed her in hiding, he found the place dark and still. The hour had grown late; probably she and her babes were sleeping peacefully. There was, however, an uneasy feeling in his mind; a presentiment that all was not well.

Vague as was this feeling, it led him to make a circuit of the house.

When he reached the rear, he paused and looked critically. All was dark and silent, but, as he looked, a sudden, faint light shone from an upper window. He looked more critically.

The window was open, and—Dick Turpin started. Against the house a ladder was leaning.

He immediately became on the alert. There could be but one explanation of this, and that was a startling one. Men had secretly entered the place, and Dick leaped to the most natural explanation of their purpose.

Sibylla's enemies had again found her place of refuge!

In a moment he was again the Lion of Leadville. His gloomy thoughts disappeared, a battle light appeared in his eyes, and he was a practical, wide-awake man with a mission to perform.

Sibylla was in danger, and it rested with him to save her. Drawing his revolver, he strode forward and began to ascend the ladder. There seemed to be no one near the open window, and he went up boldly.

This window led to a small room off the hall, and the latter was empty, but he heard sounds from beyond which showed that some one was astir. He unhesitatingly entered and, holding his revolver ready for use, passed on to investigate.

A single turn brought him to Sibylla's room.

The door was open. Looking within, he saw a startling sight. Two masked men were there, and Sibylla was on her knees, bound and gagged, but holding up her hands imploringly to one of the ruffians, who was just bending over the sleeping children.

Dick Turpin strode over the threshold with leveled revolver, but, as he did so, the weapon was knocked from his hand. A third ruffian, not until now seen, was there, and he had done prompt work for his cause.

The latest intruder was now unarmed.

A cry arose from the villainous trio, and then they dashed at him in a body. One went down under a blow from his fist, but his right arm was then seized, preventing another blow, and then they piled upon him in a body, and a desperate struggle began. A hard chance was his with odds of three to one against him!

CHAPTER XXXI.

PLAYING TRUMP CARDS.

DICK TURPIN met the danger in a way which justified the application of his *sobriquet*—the Lion of Leadville. Hemmed in with enemies though he was, his courage never wavered. Those who opposed him then had an example of what fighting was. Hold him they could not; it was like three common dogs on a mastiff; and they were whirled about like tops by his tremendous efforts.

Despite this, he could not free himself, and it seemed as though the fight must surely go against him. Such great exertions must soon exhaust his bodily strength.

The ruffians realized that an uproar was being made which was likely to attract attention, and they made haste to end it.

Turpin was forced to his knees, and helpless Sibylla, still kneeling in prayer, grew sick at heart as she saw a knife lifted above him. One thrust would end his life, and there was murder in the man's heart.

The Leadville Lion did not see the knife, but he saw Sibylla. Over him flashed a recollection of Sheriff Bradstreet, and his own desire to deliver Sibylla to him unharmed; and then a fierce fire ran through the imperiled man's veins.

With a hoarse cry he sprang to his feet, wrenching away his arms. Then one fist shot out, catching the nearest ruffian under the chin, and he was knocked half-way across the room. Again Dick shouted, and he sprang like a tiger upon a second man. His hands closed over the ruffian's neck, and he drove him resistlessly backward.

The remaining man was the one with the knife, and he started after Dick with gleaming eyes. He had gone but two paces, however, when he almost ran against a revolver which was thrust toward his face.

He recoiled in surprise and alarm.

"Hold up, right where you are, or I'll feed you food too solid for comfort!"

The words came coolly, sharply, and there stood Red Kit, her face firm and unwavering, the revolver held at a dead beat on the man's face.

He stood dumfounded for a moment, and then his hand crept toward his pocket.

"None of that!" Red Kit cried. "You can't draw a revolver here; not while I hold the reins. Keep your hand away from your pocket!"

Dick Turpin spun his prisoner into the middle of the room, where he fell in a heap. Dick then recovered his own revolver and turned to Red Kit.

"I think we have the drop on them," he coolly said. "If they take exceptions, we have the means of making the drop a dead-sure thing. Please give me your revolver, while you bind them. Gents, you are prisoners, and if you kick against our way, or try to draw your sixes, I'll have to salivate you. Do you hear?"

Red Kit had handed over her revolver, and the Lion now had both bearing upon the villainous trio.

They were fighting men, but they read the fact that it would be fatal to trifle with this grim man, and they stood in sullen anger. Red Kit knew how to tie a knot to stay, and in a short time the three were secured past remedy on their part.

They stormed and threatened some, but were so utterly powerless that no notice was taken of them. Sibylla was duly freed, and, after weeping over her children and telling how she had been surprised by the three ruffians, she went to Dick with tender eyes and quivering lips.

"You are very good to me," she said.

"I have only done my duty."

"Twice you have saved me. I feel sure that your heart is not hard against me."

"It certainly is not."

"But why, my dear husband, do you still refuse to recognize me as your wife?"

"It is the force of circumstances."

"But must this life long continue?"

Dick Turpin was silent for a few seconds, and then he replied:

"No. The end is near. Three days from now you shall have an explanation of my course; I promise you that. Until then I beg that you will rest quietly."

"I will do so; I promise you that, even as you have promised me."

Sibylla's face had grown happy, and it seemed that nearly all her doubts were swept away. She felt sure of being duly recognized now. Neither of the two saw the earnest expression on Red Kit's face as she looked at them. There seemed to be something unusual on Kit's mind, and she gazed sharply at Dick Turpin, but said nothing.

She was somewhat astonished when Dick suggested that the prisoners be confined in the cellar and there fed by her for a few days, but she gave prompt consent to the plan.

"You have helped me so with Dick that I can't refuse," she said, quietly, "and I will obey you as I would him."

The Lion looked at her sharply, but her face was composed and calm, and the momentary suspicion vanished from his mind.

The prisoners refused to say by whom they had been employed, but this was a matter of small importance to Dick, so he took them to the cellar, secured each to his satisfaction, and then left the house.

He feared no further trouble that night.

In the morning, when he went to his office, he found Jude Peterson already there. The police spy seemed to consider his hand invisible in the game, and his position impregnable, for he was as bland and friendly as ever.

Turpin sincerely hoped to see the time when the oily rascal would come to grief emphatically but he, too, had his part to play, and the real sheriff had never been more friendly. He gave Jude a cigar, and talked very pleasantly about local happenings.

Finally he added, as seriously as though he was not sure Jude already knew of the fact:

"I am going to ride this morning."

"To ride?"

"Yes; with two friends of mine. One is Count Romischoff, a Russian noble now at the Occidental. You could not guess who the other was, so I will say that it is the lady whom I lately had on trial here—Mrs. Adams. I see you look surprised, but it seems she is actually a niece of Romischoff, and, of course, his recommendation settles all doubts in regard to her."

Jude bent his head to hide the evil sparkle in his eyes, and made a suitable reply.

Beyond a doubt, he thought, the sheriff still honored and trusted him, and the police spy took credit to himself for being a very shrewd fellow.

Dick soon left, went to his room and donned his best suit of clothes, and then joined Beardsley and Meg at the hotel, where both were now living in the best of style. He had resolved to make the most of necessity, and come out in great form.

The ride was duly taken, and the supposed sheriff looked as though he had not a trouble in the world. His manner was gay, a smile always hovered on his face, and people looked in wonder to see him making gallant speeches to the woman he had lately brought to the bar in court.

The Man with the Scar looked at him keenly, half-suspiciously, several times during the ride, but finally concluded that all this gayety was but bravado, put on to conceal his anger and bitter disappointment.

Meg failed to play her part so well. Beardsley had given good reasons why all this should be, but she hated their companion too much to counterfeit friendliness toward him.

When the ride was over, the self-styled count returned to his room at the hotel, and remained smoking a cigar until he was informed that a gentleman was waiting to see him in the parlor.

He went down and was surprised to see Dick Turpin. The Lion was alone, but before he could speak, a footstep sounded behind the count and he turned quickly. Two strong, resolute men had followed him into the parlor.

"My dear count," said Turpin, calmly, "allow me to make you acquainted with Messrs. Winter and Cameron, two gentlemen from Canada."

"Reckon he knows us," replied one, with a grin.

"Know you? Certainly I do not," the Man with the Scar suspiciously answered.

"Oh, come now, that's too thin!" the man declared.

Beardsley glanced at Turpin—a suspicious, threatening light was in his eyes—and then back at the men.

"Tell me, in as few words as possible, why I ought to know you!" he tersely directed.

"Because you are Hayne Morgan, forger and embezzler, and we are the officers who first arrested you."

"Liar!" exclaimed Beardsley, his voice deep, but his manner still calm. "I defy you to show one scrap of evidence to prove that you are officers!"

Quickly the men showed badges and a warrant for the arrest of Hayne Morgan. The Man with the Scar had been in Canada often enough to know that these evidences were genuine, and he turned on Turpin with eyes which seemed to flame.

"This is your work!" he exclaimed.

"To a certain extent, it is," Turpin coolly replied. "Hearing that these gentlemen were looking for Hayne Morgan, I recognized you

from their description and telegraphed them to come here."

"I will make you the sorriest man in Colorado for the deed!" declared Beardsley; and then, turning to the officers: "Men, you are mistaken; you are being duped, and I am the victim of the game. I am not Hayne Morgan. I swear it!"

"Oh! come, now, don't do the heroics. We know you well, old boy, and we're too fly to be fooled. You swindled all Montreal with your bogus paper, and we were the officers who arrested you. You are now neatly disguised, but you have on your left cheek a scar received when trying to escape, six years ago."

"What devil's plot is this?" cried Beardsley. "Yonder man has lied to you. I am not—"

"Oh, come, now, don't! You've got to trot right along, and return to the prison you escaped from, so don't kick," the Canadian officer advised.

"We will see whether I go or not," spitefully replied the Man with the Scar. "To take me over the line you must get out extradition papers, and I can easily prove that I am not Morgan."

"You can do your proving in Montreal. Sheriff Bradstreet has kindly agreed to waive formalities, and we shall trot you to Canada, regardless of extradition papers, don't you see?"

"Yes," added the supposed sheriff. "Formalities are waived in the West."

A new light flashed to Beardsley's face. He began to see that he was in actual danger.

"This is all an infamous plot of yonder man!" he cried, pointing at Turpin. "Do you know who he is? No sheriff is he, but an outlaw—a road-agent. He is 'Dick Turpin, of Leadville,' so called."

Dick laughed lightly.

"You see, gentlemen, how much he is to be believed," he easily, lightly said.

"I see he can lie as neatly as ever," the officer replied.

"Scoundrels!" cried the Man with the Scar, "you shall not triumph over me. I will go and shout this wrong to every one I meet."

He started a pace, but the officers barred his way.

"No you won't!" said the spokesman. "Do you suppose that, when we must take you across the line without papers, we shall let you give us away to every one by the way? Not by a blamed sight! We shall smuggle you across, and smuggle you all the way. From this moment until you are on Canadian soil your mouth is closed, and you are like one dumb. We shall gag you, if need be. To give you a chance to speak would ruin our plan. No, sir, from this hour, *this minute*, you are as silent as the grave. We are old hands at this business, and don't you think you can fool, or over-reach us. 'You can't do it!'"

The man's voice was inexorable, and for the first time in his life, Dick Turpin saw his old enemy's face ghastly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PREPARING FOR FLIGHT.

It was Dick Turpin's hour of triumph. Fate had shown him the trump card he wanted to play. He had received a telegram from the Canadian officers concerning Hayne Morgan, and the description applied so well to the Man with the Scar that he had telegraphed them to come on. When he learned that they had not seen Morgan for eleven years he hesitated no longer, and had thrown his old enemy into the toils.

That the deceit would be discovered in Canada was certain, but he believed he would succeed in getting Beardsley out of the way for some weeks, and prevent him from ruining his own plans at Leadville.

Of course he was giving up all hope of wresting the man's secrets from him, for the time, but it was the only way to protect Lois and her father—and himself.

On the whole, Dick Turpin had played the highest card yet seen in the game, and the Man with the Scar found himself completely in the web—the spider had overreached himself and been caught just where liberty was invaluable.

He turned on Dick with flashing eyes and began a wild speech which was full of threats, but the Canadians did not allow him to go far. He was ordered to be silent, and, when he would not obey, was seized, bound and gagged.

He fought like a madman, but all in vain.

A carriage had been waiting at the rear door of the hotel, and into this the prisoner was thrust. Then the carriage whirled away, and the Man with the Scar was gone from the scene.

Dick Turpin smiled grimly. His most dreaded enemy was gone, and he now had strong hopes of passing the remaining danger successfully. It was not to be, however, that he should be without sources of alarm.

He had hardly left the hotel when he met Red Kit on the street. She looked somewhat excited, and spoke to him abruptly:

"I've got something to say."

"What is it, Miss Hallock?"

"The doctor says the sick man is nearing

the crisis of his fever, and that, before to-morrow noon, he will either be conscious or without life."

"The sick man.' Do you mean Dick Turpin?"

"Yes."

"So the doctor thinks the fever will turn by noon to-morrow?"

"Yes, and, perhaps, before. I thought you might want to know at once."

Was there a significance in Red Kit's voice? Dick looked at her sharply. Did she suspect his identity? If so, her face gave no sign. She looked grave, but nothing more.

"Thank you, Kit," he replied. "I am very much obliged—that is, of course I am interested. I am in haste now, but I will see you again. I think I will remain beside Turpin's bed to-morrow. Good-day!"

He spoke abruptly and hastened away. Red Kit's announcement had, in one sense, been startling. It showed him that the time he had counted on was not to be his; that if he carried out his scheme of saving Raoul Legrand it must be done that night, and, by sunrise of the following morning, he and Lois must be in rapid flight.

"It shall be so!" he muttered. "Delay would be madness, and I will start the wheels of the chariot at once."

Hastening to Bowie Ben's room, he found his ally in, and briefly told what had occurred, as well as his plans for the future; and Ben unhesitatingly agreed to help Legrand away, and all else that was necessary.

"We have work for to-day, too," continued Turpin. "I must see Lois, but I dare not break in on her unannounced. She thinks me ill in bed, you know. You must precede me by half an hour, Ben, and let her know that I am alive and well."

"Again, I shall be glad to help you, captain."

"Then get your horse and go at once, and I will follow on Brutus."

Ben hastened away, and, in due time, Dick mounted the black horse and rode over the well-remembered trail. When he came within sight of the house, all seemed as of old. He had scarcely appeared when Bowie Ben came out of the house and galloped toward him.

As they met, the subordinate waved his hand with a cheery smile.

"All is well, captain. Go on, for she is awaiting you!"

And then the messenger galloped on rapidly.

"Faithful Ben!" thought the ex-road-agent. "It only remains to convince Red Kit that he is the man who would make her happiest, and then I shall, indeed, be content. He is a fine fellow, and Red Kit is like gold in the rough; once separate the precious metal from the refuse material, and she would be a noble woman. I can well forgive, now, all that she has done."

He rode to the door.

He cast Brutus's rein over a hook and entered the house.

Mrs. Legrand was not visible, but, in the sitting-room, Lois sat awaiting him—paler than of old, but with the same handsome, refined face; the same soulful eyes; and the same smile which had charmed him so in days of yore.

What he said he could not have told; he only knew that she was clasped to his heart; that her arms were about his neck; and that her dear head was on his shoulder! He knew that the light of a great happiness was around and about him, and the potent sun of love swept away all the clouds of the dark, bitter past.

Why should we dwell on that interview? In Dick Turpin's estimation, it was too sacred for other eyes, and we will not intrude.

Enough to say that Lois declared that her feelings had not changed; that she still believed in his honor, despite the fact that he was "Dick Turpin, of Leadville;" and that she was willing to flee with him, from his foes, at any time. She was much stronger, she assured him, and fully able to bear the journey.

It was definitely arranged that the great attempt should be made the following morning, and that she should be in readiness to go when he appeared with her father. After that it was a matter of speed and shrewdness, but Dick was confident that all pursuers could be outstripped, and that they could reach a place of safety.

Mrs. Legrand came into the room for a few minutes before Dick left, but even his sanguine view of the future did not serve to put her in a mood satisfactory to him.

She was not so reconciled to the situation as was Lois, and coldness and resentment tinged her manner toward him. He, however, relied upon time to bring her old cordiality back.

He finally left the house and rode back to Leadville.

His heart was lighter than it had been for many days, for he anticipated no great trouble in releasing Legrand, and, after that, he believed he could defy all pursuit.

Going to the sheriff's office, he wrote a letter which he addressed to Bradstreet. In this he referred to certain things which had occurred since he assumed the real sheriff's identity, and begged the latter to believe that he had tried to guard his interests as far as possible, and told what he knew about Sibylla.

This letter he did not intend to trust out of his own hands until Legrand was free, so he put it in his pocket for the time being.

Next, he went again to Bowie Ben. He found his ally in a gloomy mood, for which he could hardly account, and when he questioned him Ben did not at first give a direct answer.

"Come," urged Dick, "let me know all. You are doing all you can to help me to happiness. Will you not give me a chance to help you? Does it relate to Red Kit?"

"To tell the truth, yes," Ben admitted. "You see, the situation is very peculiar. I am going with you; I must go, for I don't want to remain here and be lynched; and as it is not likely we shall stop short of California, the question arises: Where will Red Kit be when I get around to look her up again?"

"I had not thought of that," Dick gravely confessed. "It must be arranged somehow. Why not let Kit go with us, Ben?"

"No, no!" was the hasty reply. "That would never do. Don't think of it."

"Then, why not appoint an address to which you can write at any time, and so keep informed concerning her?"

But Bowie Ben shook his head.

"Never mind, captain; I had rather let the stream run on. It'll come out right in the end, I dare say. Considering that Kit don't seem to take to me, I had rather let the matter rest for awhile; so say no more, captain—say no more. At what hour do you intend to rescue Legrand?"

"Not until well toward morning. The arrangements I have made for our flight are such that we don't want to leave Legrand's house until sunrise. If Legrand gets there at daybreak, it will be soon enough."

For some time longer the two remained in conversation and then they separated for awhile.

Dick Turpin, of Leadville, walked the streets for two hours, his mind the seat of strange and varied thoughts. Good luck had attended his daring deed, and he bade fair to get away from the city successfully, but how much further he would get was a question.

The future was shrouded in darkness, and he must await developments.

The night wore slowly on, and it seemed as though the hour of action would never come, but come it did at last. Dick and Ben met by appointment, and then they turned their attention to rescuing Legrand.

No elaborate work was necessary for this; Dick had already secretly introduced a note to the prisoner's cell, which informed him that friends would effect his rescue at a certain hour, and bade him be ready to go at a moment's notice. The rest was to be done by a very simple trick.

They went to the jail and Dick aroused the guard, while Ben kept well back so as not to be seen. Dick was admitted, and then he sent the guard to another part of the jail on an errand which would occupy several minutes of his time. Of course he obeyed the "sheriff" readily.

He was no sooner out of sight than Bowie Ben glided in, Legrand's cell door was unlocked, and, while Dick stood back behind the door, Ben entered.

There stood Legrand, an eager look on his face.

"Come!" said Ben, quickly. "Not one moment is to be lost. Come!"

Legrand warmly wrung his hand.

"Heaven bless you!" he said, huskily; and then they glided from the jail, with quick, light steps.

Dick Turpin relocked the cell door, and, when the guard returned, was waiting in the corridor, as though nothing had occurred. He finished the details of the bogus errand upon which he pretended he had come, and then left the jail.

All had thus far worked finely, and he had little fear for the future. Ben and Legrand had gone on, but Brutus was near at hand and he could overtake them if he wished. This, however, was not a part of the plan. Legrand was still unsuspecting of his identity, and as the miner felt so bitter against Dick Turpin, the ex-road-agent preferred to let Ben and Lois talk with him first, and not see his prospective father-in-law until morning.

Consequently, when he had mounted Brutus, he only rode near enough to keep them in sight, and see that no harm came to them.

In this way Leadville was passed. Dick followed them for another mile, and then, convinced that all danger to them was past, he halted and watched them out of sight. Gradually men and horses faded in the darkness, and then he turned back.

He had yet to leave the letter for the real Sheriff Bradstreet.

He reached the office, left Brutus at the door and entered. Lighting the lamp, he put the letter away where it was not likely to be found until the sheriff overhauled his papers.

"I hope Rob won't think hard of me when he has read it, and seen Sibylla. True, he will not suspect the most important secret of all, but he will see that I have tried to uphold the honor of his official position."

He was thinking thus when a footfall caused him to wheel about.

There stood Jude Peterson, the police spy.

The new-comer did not look as meek and friendly as usual. There was a sneering smile on his dark face, and he spoke in an offensive tone:

"You work late, sheriff."

"Rather," Dick replied, looking at him keenly.

"One would think you had important business on hand."

"Don't I always have?"

"Yes, but seldom so important as on this night."

Significant was Jude's manner, and his evil smile somehow reminded Dick of a snake with erected head.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that your game is up, Dick Turpin!"

There was a sudden change in the police spy's manner, his voice had become sharp and stern, and he drew a revolver with a jerk.

It did not rise to a level. With a great bound Dick Turpin reached his side, and, in a moment more, the weapon was wrenched away. The adventurer was, indeed, the Lion of Leadville then. Knowing the danger, all his wrath turned against the mocking rascal, and he practically lost his head. His eyes were flaming, and his coolness all gone. He remembered only that Jude had the power to ruin all, if given a chance, and he turned the revolver and brought it down on his head with telling force.

The police spy dropped like a lump of lead to the floor.

There was a pause, during which the Lion of Leadville did not stir any more than the man who lay so still at his feet. He had struck in the heat of passion, but when he saw his enemy helpless at his feet he grew calm again and began to fear that his blow had proved fatal—fear it, because, villain that Jude was, the ex-road-agent did not wish to close his career at Leadville with manslaughter on his hands.

He knelt beside the fallen man and examined him.

Nothing definite could be told, but he did not believe Jude was more than stunned.

The revolver had made a slight bruise, but no blood flowed, and the spy's condition did not seem alarming.

Turpin breathed freer, and then, after some thought, he proceeded to bind and gag his enemy. This done, he stowed him away in the closet where Sam Tobin had once been confined.

There was no danger but he would be found soon, and this would prevent his giving untimely alarm. This done, he extinguished the light, locked the office and rode away toward Legrand's.

Leadville was soon passed, and, when outside the town, he stopped Brutus and looked back, thinking:

"Farewell, city of the mountains! The most important scenes of my later life have occurred in, and near, your limits, but I hope never to see you again. My name will not soon be forgotten here, but, in a new and peaceful life, I shall forget you as far as possible!"

And then he rode on—rode to join Lois!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A THUNDERBOLT.

At the same time that Dick Turpin was rescuing Legrand from prison, an important scene was being enacted by the bedside of Sheriff Bradstreet. The doctor who had had charge of him did not leave the room that night. He read the fact that the crisis of the fever was at hand, and, though he supposed his patient to be only Dick Turpin, of Leadville, he was sufficiently devoted to his profession to eagerly desire to save him.

Moreover, the night-nurse, the supposed colored man, had not come around, and the doctor was resolved that the sick man should have every attention.

He watched him constantly through the passing hours, doing what he could professionally, and waiting for the turn of the fever.

The night was well spent when he noticed a perceptible difference in his patient's breathing, and the hot, fevered cuticle began to assume more favorable conditions.

The physician's hopes rose high.

"He will live!" he thought, exultantly.

Still the minutes rolled on until—Sheriff Bradstreet opened his eyes. The light of reason was in them, but he looked at the doctor in a puzzled way.

"It's all right," said the latter. "Don't worry yourself in the least. You're all right now."

"Have I been hurt?"

The sheriff's voice was weak, but nowhere near as much so as was to be expected.

"Yes, and you've been sick, but all has turned well. Have no more fear, Mr. Turpin."

"Turpin! Why do you call me that?" demanded the sick man, with surprising vigor.

"Oh! never mind. Here is medicine; drink it, and you will be all right."

"Wait! Why did you call me Turpin?"

It was an irritable question, caused wholly by Bradstreet's aversion to the Lion of Leadville.

"Isn't that your name?"

"My name! Certainly not. I am Sheriff Bradstreet!"

"Well, never mind. Drink this, please."

"Not yet! Am I, or am I not, Sheriff Bradstreet?"

"Well, there is another man who is filling the office, but you may be the genuine article," the doctor replied, little suspecting how near he had come to the truth.

"Another man filling the office?" echoed the patient, his eyes unnaturally large.

"Yes, but never mind that. Here is your medicine."

"But where is Dick Turpin? You called me Turpin. Do you mean—"

"Sir, I am your physician, and I must insist upon obedience. Your life depends upon it. Drink this!"

"One moment, and one only, Doctor Orme. Did you, or did you not, dress a wound in Robert Bradstreet's left arm, near the 'muscle,' a year ago?"

"I did."

"Would you recognize that wound now by the scar?"

"Certainly."

"Then I must ask you to look at my arm. If you then say that I am Dick Turpin, I will admit that I don't know who I am. In any case, I will then drink what you offer."

Never before had Doctor Orme seen a man with so much strength under such circumstances, and the whole affair had grown mysterious, the more so because he had actually noticed, despite his patient's burns, that there was a resemblance between him and the supposed sheriff.

Impressed with a sudden idea, he looked at the arm.

There was a scar, and he could almost have sworn there was not another like it in the world; and that scar was the result of a wound he had dressed a year before on Sheriff Bradstreet's arm.

"Well?" questioned the patient, coolly.

"By my life, you are Bradstreet! But who is—"

"If any one is acting as Sheriff Bradstreet here, he is an impostor. Again I ask, where is Dick Turpin?"

"Shoot me if I don't believe he is masquerading in your shoes! You have been here as Dick Turpin, and somebody else has been acting as Sheriff Bradstreet."

"Rest assured it is the daring outlaw, and you must head him off; he must be arrested at once. I can do nothing. What you say about my condition is correct; I must be quiet. I suppose yonder draught is to put me asleep. Promise me solemnly that you will at once give the alarm, and I will drink."

"I do promise—nay, I swear it!"

"Give me the draught."

Doctor Orme obeyed, and the sick man closed his eyes.

"I leave all to you," he said.

His coolness was wonderful, and the doctor grimly thought that he ought to take a drug fully as much as his patient, for he was nervous and angry, but never before had he been so amazed. How to account for it he did not know, but he determined to keep his promise at once.

Sitting down, he hastily wrote a note, and then called an attendant.

"Take this to the mayor at once," he directed. "Lose no time by the way; here is money—get a horse, and gallop like Tam O'Shanter. The devil is let loose, and your head depends on your speed. No questions; go—go!"

He pushed the man from the place, and then went back to Bradstreet. The latter had already fallen asleep.

"He will live," thought Orme. "Live! He must do so, to help solve this mystery. By my life, I think Leadville will ring before night with the strangest story ever told within its limits!"

Dick Turpin, of Leadville, galloped rapidly away through the gray dawn of the morning, but Brutus had never before seemed so slow. He was going like a bird, in reality, but the Lion longed to reach his destination and once more clasp Lois in his arms.

His heart beat high with hope, and his face was almost as gentle as a woman's. At last!—at last!—he was leaving plot and double-dealing and crime behind; he was going to an honest life; to peace and happiness; to Lois!

"On, Brutus, on! Go as you never went before, boy, for when our journey ends I shall be the happiest man in the wide, wide world!"

They rattled through the last pass, emerged to a level, and the Legrand house lay before him. It looked somewhat dreary, for no smoke was rising from the chimney, but this was not to be wondered at. Legrand had had but two hours at the place since his return, and the whole family, including Ben, had probably been very busy.

Dick glanced at the mountain-tops, noting the position of the sun.

"It is within fifteen minutes of the time I set for our departure," he thought, and then clattered up to the door.

Throwing the rein loosely over Brutus's neck he leaped from the saddle and strode inside the house. The sitting-room door was closed, and it then occurred to him that everything was singularly silent about the place; and he was somewhat surprised that neither Lois nor Bowie Ben met him; but he opened the door and entered the sitting-room.

There he paused.

The room was vacant, so far as human beings were concerned, and the confusion which existed everywhere gave it a gloomy look. As he stood there not a sound met his ears, and an air of desolation seemed to hover about the place.

Where was Lois? Where was Bowie Ben? Where were Legrand and his wife?

At this moment Dick's roving glance caught sight of an envelope on the table, and he strode forward and picked it up. It bore an address in two words:

"Richard Barnes!"

It was the name under which he had wooed Lois, and the writing was hers. Dick hurriedly tore the envelope open. There he found a letter for him still in Lois's writing, though it was far from being as regular as usual.

He began to read rapidly, but only a few lines had he seen when his face became as pale as marble, the letter fell from his grasp and he dropped into a chair with a groan. One would have said, to see him then, that life itself was ebbing away, but the knife which penetrates the heart is more merciful than the stab he had received.

For some minutes he sat staring blankly at the fatal letter, and then he lifted it again.

This is what was written there:

"RICHARD:—I beg that you will not think too harshly of me, for my own heart bleeds as I write. I am about to flee, as planned, but not in your company. Father and mother are both against you, and they have convinced me—against my will, believe me!—that it is best that you and I should forever part. I am sorry that this is so, but I feel that 'tis my duty to obey them. Besides, Bowie Ben has asked me to become his wife, and since he has been coming here I have seen that he is a perfect gentleman. I am sure that I shall be happy with him, and we shall be married as soon as possible; and then, with father and mother, go to some distant place. "I am afraid you will blame me, Richard, but what can I do? Father and mother will not consent to ever speak with you again, and—I do not feel that I am to blame for loving Bowie Ben. Of course I must consider my own happiness first of all, and I know that, as his wife, I shall be happy. Richard, good-by! We shall never meet again, for I am going far, far away, but I shall think kindly of you, and hope for your happiness. I hope, too, that you will be a better man. If you had been what you seemed, all would have been well; but I have been reared to regard honesty, truth and honor as desirable above all things. You did very wrong to deceive me, and, of course, you cannot expect me to marry a road-agent and outlaw."

"P. S.—If my conduct hurts your feelings, I am sorry. Please forgive me, for I shall always be your friend."

Below this was written in a bold, masculine hand:

"CAPTAIN:—I feel myself the most unconscionable villain who ever drew the breath of life. My treachery is base and cowardly, and you will not be to blame if you shoot me on sight. Why, oh! why did you send me to visit Lois Legrand? I loved her from the first, and, though I struggled against it, went on—on—on! I am not manly enough to resist temptation, and I am about to steal her from you. It is a villainous act, and no punishment could be too severe for me."

Again the letter fell from Dick Turpin's hands.

He knew now what meant the silence about the house.

Those whom he had expected to meet him were gone—all gone! In the very moment when his heart was bounding with joy, and with hope of a happy future after all his stormy experience in the past, he had received a blow which cut to his heart and left him in desolation and gloom.

They were gone—all gone!

Gone was Legrand, whom he had rescued from prison, for whom he had lived in the midst of imminent danger for many a weary day.

Gone was Bowie Ben, the man he had made his bosom friend, and whom he had trusted implicitly.

Gone was Lois, the girl he had idolized; in whom he had placed unwavering faith, and whom he had relied upon to turn the black, bitter past into sunshine and peace.

They were gone—all gone!

How long he sat there he never knew. The gloom of utter despair had fallen around and about him, and he took heed neither to the present nor future. The treachery of the two he had so fully trusted overwhelmed him. Bowie Ben's peculiar manner at their last interview, in the latter's room, was fully explained. He had not meditated treachery then, but it was his love for Lois—which then seemed hopeless—which had made him gloomy.

The man was not wholly hardened, and his better nature had cried out against him and his treachery. "Why, oh! why did you send me to visit Lois Legrand?" he had asked, in his note. Why, indeed? That had been Dick's fatal mistake. Ben had acted the consoler too well; he

had won not only confidence but love; and "his was the end."

And Lois?

Her letter had not been so sincere as Ben's. She had asked for forgiveness, and defended herself in the same breath. It was the pitiable defense of a weak, shallow nature. Even in the act of treachery, she had advised Dick to "be a better man;" she had written: "Of course you cannot expect me to marry a road-agent and outlaw," and in the same breath stated that she was about to marry Bowie Ben; and had tried to shift the blame of her faithlessness upon her parents.

That they had influenced her was not to be doubted, but, taking her letter and her conduct as a criterion, it proved that she was weak, fickle and without honor herself.

If she had discarded Dick Turpin because he was a road-agent, it would not have been strange; but, only the day before, with her arms about his neck she had sworn that she loved him as well as ever, and would go with him to the ends of the earth, and now she had fled with Bowie Ben, whose record matched Dick's point for point, and she declared that she loved him—loved only Bowie Ben!

Oh! heart of Dick Turpin! was ever treachery blacker?

They were gone—all gone!

Dick Turpin might have sat there for hours, but there was the clatter of a horse's feet; a lull; the sound of human feet on the floor, and Red Kit burst into the room, her eyes large and startled, her brick-red hair disheveled, and her cheeks aglow.

"Dick! Dick!" she cried, "they are coming to arrest you!"

The stricken man looked at her dully.

"They are gone—all gone!" he muttered.

"Don't you hear me? The officers are coming. Flee for your life!"

But still he muttered, like one in a dream:

"They are gone—all gone!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CHAINED LION.

RED KIT sprang forward, caught Dick by the shoulder and shook him energetically.

"Arouse!" she exclaimed. "I know they are gone, for I saw them pass across the mountain, but is that any reason why you should stay here and be caught? They know at Leadville just who you are; Sheriff Bradstreet has recovered his mind, and your trick is known. Worse than that, officers are on their way to arrest you. Wake up! Will you tamely be captured?"

The stricken Lion shook his head.

"I don't know," he muttered.

He was looking at vacancy, and the light of intelligence had gone from his face and eyes. Had he been an idiot, he would not have been more expressionless, except that the shadow of a great sorrow was there. The blow had penetrated deeply.

Red Kit was in despair.

"Oh! Dick, Dick!" she cried, "can't you understand? Your life depends on your getting away from here at once. They will hang you if you are taken. Don't think any more about her! I am sorry for you, but it won't do any good. Come away, Dick; come!"

There was a faint gleam of interest on his part.

"Where shall I go?"

"To the mountains; anywhere to escape those terrible men."

"Let them come! Let them hang me! It don't matter now, for who would care?"

Red Kit's lips opened for a reply, and then closed again. She sighed deeply.

"Did you care for her so much?"

"Let them come!" he repeated. "Let them hang me. Where is a rope? Bring one, call the lynchers, and let them do their work. I want to be hung!"

"Dick, Dick! this is madness! Oh! will you not come away? Every minute brings those men nearer, and then you will be lost."

"I am lost now!" he exclaimed, fiercely.

"There's nothing left now but dust and ashes, ruin and desolation. This is the end of all—double-dealing, crime, treachery, hope, ambition, happiness! This is, indeed, the end. Let them come! Who cares?"

"I do, Dick; I care with all my heart. Oh! let me be your sister; your tender, loving sister. You are in trouble; let me console you. Come with me!"

The girl's eyes were swimming with tears and her voice was full of trembling and pleading, but Dick shook his head. She went to the window and looked out. Then a cry escaped her lips and she hastened back to his side.

"Oh! Dick, Dick!" she sharply, wildly cried, "they are in sight; they are almost here. Will you let them take you? Come away until you can think of this calmly. Do, for Heaven's sake! do come, Dick!"

She dropped on her knees, and almost hysterically fondled and kissed his hands. Her heart was in the attempt, and she tried with every act to arouse him from his fatal stupor. She realized what the coming of the now-visible riders meant, and her heart was wrung with woman's sharpest misery; of love touched to the heart. Never had

she loved Dick Turpin more, and she would have died for him then; but to have him die—to have him go to Leadville as a prisoner—oh! the blackest night of earth and time was as nothing to the awful gloom which such a thing would throw around her heart.

But all her pleading, and all her tender caresses and imploring words, could not move Dick Turpin. He was stunned, dazed, uncertain, hopeless; his mind was in a fog to which penetrated no ray of hope or light.

There was a clattering of hoofs which told of the coming of the men of Leadville, and Red Kit abandoned all attempts. There was yet time for her to escape, but she did not go. Dropping into a chair, she burst into bitter tears, and sobbed her whole form convulsively.

The horsemen dashed up to the door.

They came tramping into the room.

"Here he is!" cried one, who had been a leading assistant of Bradstreet. "By George! here's our man. Cover him with your revolvers, men, and shoot him down if he tries to escape!"

Dick Turpin arose, folded his arms and looked steadily at the last speaker.

"You need not draw your revolvers," he said, in a mild, grave voice. "I shall not try to escape. All you have to do is to take me."

"Oh! you've got some trick to play, have you?" cried the officer, suspiciously.

"No; I have none to play."

"Perhaps you deny that you are Dick Turpin, of Leadville."

"No; I am he."

"The blazes you are! Seems to me you are wonderful meek, all at once."

"My race is run, that's all. You'll find a rope in the outhouse, I think."

"A rope? What the dickens do I want of a rope?"

"To hang me!"

Dick Turpin spoke with the utmost calmness, as though he had no personal interest in the matter whatever, but the chief officer promptly retorted:

"No, you don't! You'd like to escape your deserts at the hands of law, and take a quick run on a rope, but it don't work here. You're going back to Leadville. Bind him, men!"

"All right!"

In the same mechanically unmoved, stony way, Dick put out his hands. The men proceeded to bind him, and did it in a way which seemed suitable to such a desperate ruffian as the Lion of Leadville. No danger was there of his breaking the bonds put upon him.

When this was done the leader of the capturing party looked around.

"Where's that red-headed girl?" he asked.

Sure enough, in the confusion Red Kit had glided away, and when they searched for her, the only result was to find that she had taken her own horse, and Brutus, and made good her escape.

"It's a wonder she didn't take more animals," the leader observed; "horse-thieves ain't usually so easy to satisfy, and the red-head has got true desperado blood in her veins. Well, never mind, she was the one who first gave Dick Turpin away, and I s'pose she'd have got off scot free if we had nabbed her. Now, ho! for Leadville, boys, Dick Turpin and all!"

They went at once.

During the ride the prisoner did not speak once. He sat on his horse like a statue, looking at vacancy, answering no one, and, really, unconscious of all around him. His captors thought he was feigning sudden insanity, or imbecility, but they did not know that his mind was actually a desert.

When Leadville was reached, he was thrust into a cell, heavily ironed, chained to the wall and seven guards set over him. This was the work of his captor, who swore that he would deliver the prisoner safely to Bradstreet if he "had to put him in a patent safe, such as the mayor used for his state papers."

Afterward, Bradstreet could do as he saw fit.

By noon every one in Leadville had heard the news; the city rung with it. Bradstreet, who had been thought well, and at the head of police affairs, was flat on his back with fever; and Dick Turpin, who had been thought the fever-stricken man, had been flourishing around as sheriff, and had done some remarkable things.

Ay, the city rung with the news, and nobody had more to say than the rich and fashionable circle who set themselves up as about fifty per cent. better than the average mortal. Well might the rich old men, and the beautiful young ladies, remember Dick Turpin, of Leadville.

He had done many strange, daring, audacious things, but one in particular seemed to them to eclipse all others. They remembered the mayor's ball, and the part Dick had played there. He had been petted, admired, and lifted, for the night, to that august perch of the fashionable world where said world poises itself daintily on a pedestal whereof the cornice is of gold and the base proper of brass—and, oh! horror, the man thus lifted had been Dick Turpin, of Leadville.

On the whole, the young ladies had the worst of all.

These fascinating butterflies, who had always

called the Lion a barbarian, wretch, monster and brute—they had actually waited time and again with him; his arms had encircled their waists; they had leaned lovingly upon him; had listened graciously while he whispered gallant speeches, and given tender glance for tender glance; in point of fact they had flirted desperately with him—several remembered that he had carried away choice flowers from their bouquets—and at last a score of the most exclusive of the charmed circle were forced to admit that decidedly loving words had been listened to and returned.

AND THAT MAN HAD BEEN DICK TURPIN!

Oh! heart of sweet sixteen, of wise seventeen, of supercilious eighteen, of lofty nineteen, of peerless, transcendental twenty, will not the memory of that awful night haunt on through countless years? Will you ever recover from the shock of knowing that an outlaw's arm has been around your waist, and that you whispered tender speeches to him so willingly?

The officers of law were also bitter against the bold adventurer. To his deeds on the road he had added the unpardonable crime of usurping Bradstreet's place, and it is to be feared that a lynching party would have met with but little opposition.

An unexpected incident added fresh fuel to the fires of their hatred.

Mr. Chester, the aged minister, appeared with a singular story. He laid before the officers two revolvers which, much to his surprise, he had just found in the pocket of the coat he had worn at the interrupted wedding. Of these revolvers, each of which had one empty chamber, one was recognized as Sheriff Bradstreet's, while the other had the letters "D. T." rudely marked on the barrel, and was believed to be Dick Turpin's.

Then it was that the fickle people decided that Turpin, and not Legrand, had shot Abe Knowlton, and it was demanded that he be tried on the charge of murder.

Evidence in this line was injured by the discovery that Turpin's revolver had a bore too small to carry the fatal bullet, while Bradstreet's was just right; but it was easy to suggest that the road-agent had seized and used the sheriff's, and the authorities yielded to the universal clamor and agreed to bring the man to trial at once.

He was to be tried for murder!

CHAPTER XXXV.

SENTENCED TO THE GALLOWS.

ALL through the first day of his captivity, Dick Turpin sat almost like a statue in his cell. When the guards who were with him spoke, he did not answer. Loaded with irons, he sat and stared at the blank wall with some absent, hopeless expression on his face and said nothing. Even the coarse, rough jokes of the men at his expense failed to arouse the faintest sign of anger.

The Lion of Leadville was tamed at last—tamed by dire misfortune.

No one came to see him. There was no friend to cheer him in his misery, for they were gone—all gone. The homeless dog that skulked through the street was not more despised and forsaken. Leadville hated him—could never forget the wound to its pride—and found pleasure only in anticipating his death on the gallows.

People came to look through the bars and see the caged lion. They went away, exulting at his evident misery. He was a crushed, broken-spirited man, and they felt that the first step in their revenge was taken. They knew of his desertion by those he had loved and trusted, and they tried to forget their wounded feelings by jesting about his misery.

Some, when they saw him so oblivious to all around him, wondered what course his thoughts were taking. Could they have known, they would have said that he was a madman.

Mad or not, he saw one picture continually as he sat there. He saw four people riding along the winding mountain road at a rapid pace. At the head went Raoul Legrand and his wife. Behind them, riding side by side, went Bowie Ben and Lois.

All were nervous and frequently looked behind, as though dreading pursuit, but they tried at times to be gay. Lois seemed the lightest-hearted of all. Now and then Bowie Ben would fall into deep thought, and his face assume a look of deep gloom. His conscience smote him, but when Lois aroused him, he would look at her tenderly.

It was, of course, pure imagination, but Turpin seemed to see them go on mile after mile, past varied bits of scenery, and ever in his mind sounded the tread of their horses.

Tramp! tramp! tramp!

It was as though every hoof-beat was against his throbbing brain, and the pain was keen and continuous.

He was, indeed, deserted and alone. Common treachery he could well bear, but not that of the two he had most loved and trusted. Cimmerian darkness had fallen on his life, and he only regretted that he lived.

Early in the evening an order came which sent all his guards from the cell. He was left

alone, but did not realize the change. Neither did he realize, a little later, that a single man had entered the place and stood looking at him.

It was Jude Peterson.

The face of the police spy was pale, and a cloth was wound around his head, but, though this was plainly due to the blow he had received from Dick's hand, his face did not bear the malignant expression one might have expected there.

He waited for Dick to speak, but, as the latter said nothing, was himself obliged to break the silence.

"Good-evening, Mr. Turpin!"

The prisoner shivered, moved his ironed hands, and then, like one coming out of a fog, lifted his gaze to Peterson's face. The latter repeated his words, and Dick then quickly answered:

"So it is you?"

"Yes."

Jude touched his bandaged head, and added:

"I have this to remember you by."

"I recollect that you were hurt—think you fell from a horse. No, wait! I remember now. We fought, and I shut you up in a closet."

"From which I was rescued in due time. I bear you no ill-will for that blow, and if I had known that you were Turpin long enough before then to have thought calmly on the situation, we should never have had our trouble. I have no grudge against Dick Turpin, and I am now here as your friend. It was through my influence that the guards set here by the deputy-sheriff were withdrawn. I argued that it was absurd to have a friendless, heavily ironed man watched by a regiment of officers."

Turpin had thoroughly aroused, and he now quietly said:

"What ax have you got to grind, Jude?"

The police spy looked furtively around before he replied, and then lowered his voice.

"I propose to set you free if we can make a bargain."

"Ah! What do you want?"

"First, a friend of mine—in brief, she who was tried for attempting your life at Coffin Gulch—wants to know how you learned so much of her past life."

"First item. What next?"

"I think that I ought to be paid for releasing you. As Dick Turpin, of Leadville, you have made a pile of money. Give me a fair share, and I will get you safely from the city, so that you may go forth over the land as free as any man who lives."

"What more?"

"Nothing. My conditions are simple."

"Very simple, Judas, but they are declined. I make terms with no one like you. I have long known that you used your official position here to help the knaves and law-breakers of Leadville, but you cannot make terms with me. I don't want to escape."

Jude bit his lips angrily.

"Do you prefer to remain and be hung?"

"Yes."

"You are to be put on trial for killing Abe Knowlton. They have exonerated Legrand, and you take his place as accused. The missing revolvers have been found in Chester's possession. How the old man happened to have them he can't explain, but it is clear to every one else that he picked them up and put them in his pocket as a common man would throw a dynamite bomb into the river—to get the devil's weapon out of the way—and then forget them. You know how weak his mind is. But let me speak of your case. You're to be tried for murder."

"Very well."

"Very well! Are you mad?"

"No."

"Then why remain here like a fool, when I promise to help you away?"

"Because I would not go if the door was held wide open for me. I am indifferent to the future. Let them hang me if they wish. I don't care!"

"Fool!"

"Thank you!"

Jude was very angry, as well as disgusted. The apathetic coolness of the prisoner was something he had not expected. He glanced toward the jail corridor, and then abruptly said:

"Have your own way in this matter. I'll come to you again when you are sentenced to the gallows, and I'll wager something you'll not be so stiff."

"I will never accept a favor from your hands, Judas. You are too contemptible a hound for my taste. Yes, you had better leave me. Go! get out of my sight. You poison the air!"

Dick did not raise his voice, but deep disgust was in his tone and Jude muttered a curse, turned and strode from the cell. The prisoner was again alone.

The following day the court-room was crowded to hear, and see, Dick Turpin, of Leadville, tried for the murder of Abe Knowlton. Rich and poor came alike, but, as had been the case for years, the former were the enemies of the prisoner, while his few sympathizers were found among the poor.

We need not dwell upon the trial. It was more of a farce than Legrand's had been, for the men who had testified against the miner

were now sure that Dick Turpin had done the deed.

The evidence would not have stood in any legitimate court, but it served the prosecutors' purpose there. When a verdict was reached, it was "guilty."

And then the same judge who had sentenced Raoul Legrand proceeded to sentence Turpin. He was given five days in which to live. At the end of that time he was to be hanged by the neck until dead.

He went back to his cell a doomed man, while Leadville exulted. No more would the terrible outlaw rob the stages and pedestrians, and no more would he make love to the belles of the town.

Truly, Leadville had reason to rejoice and be exceeding glad.

But the calmest man there was Dick Turpin. The visit of the police spy had aroused him from apathy, and, after that, nothing escaped his notice, though he was wholly indifferent as to his fate. He did not neglect his food, and seemed to have no trouble now, but, when his execution was referred to, he spoke of it as coolly as though it was to be the most trivial experience of his life.

One—two—three more days passed.

Night followed, and Dick went to his bed at an early hour. His irons had been reduced to handcuffs on his wrists, and he had managed to rest fairly with them on, thus far. He expected to do so this night, and lay down with his clothing on, as usual.

He fell asleep, and some hours passed, but he finally awoke with the consciousness that some one had touched him on the shoulder. A light was burning, and, as he turned his head, he saw—*Red Kit!*

It was a great surprise, but it sent his blood shooting through his veins with fresh vigor. Stricken and stunned as he had been when last at Legrand's cottage, he was aware that the mountain girl had tried heroically, fervently, to save him from arrest, and he was not ungrateful.

He would have spoken, but she laid her hand on his lips.

"Softly, Dick, softly! Don't speak too loud. I have come to rescue you."

"To rescue me?"

"Yes. See! here is the key which will unlock your handcuffs, and there will be no trouble after that. Ah! I have not been idle. Here!—hold out your hands, and let us go at once!"

Her manner was eager, but he held his hands away.

"I thank you, Kit; from the depths of my heart, I thank you; but I can't go. Life has lost its charms for me, and I will remain and face my fate. But you, Kit—I can't say too much in praise of you. When all others deserted me, you remained faithful. They were the friends of my days of prosperity; you of my time of adversity. When they struck me to the heart, you gave all the wealth of your sympathy to the crushed wretch who had no other friend. Kit, may all blessings be yours in the future! I shall die hoping that you may live long and happily."

Her face had grown soft, tender, womanly in the extreme.

"Do you mean it, Dick?"

"I do, upon my sacred word."

"Then make me happy!" she replied, in a trembling voice. "If you go to the awful death to which they have doomed you, my after life will be a curse to me."

"No, no, Kit; do not say that. You are young, and new avenues of life are before you. Go forth and begin anew, forgetting the old, dark past."

"I can never forget, this side the grave, and I had rather die than leave you here. Dick, Dick! will you not go with me? The way is clear; come, let us go!"

"I am sorry, Kit, but it can't be. My decision is made. I shall remain and meet my fate!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HEMMED IN.

RED KIT did not look dismayed at this assertion. Strong as were Turpin's words, she believed that there was a wavering of his resolution, and she redoubled her efforts. Not once, however, did she refer to her love for him, or ask that he should place her in his heart where Lois Legrand had reigned before her treachery. It was such an argument as a strong, devoted friend would use.

Dick Turpin did waver. The girl's presence brought back the old life vividly, and blood, which had been for days sluggish, began to flow as usual. His mind began to shape arguments in support of her arguments.

Why, he asked himself, should he remain and be disgracefully deprived of life on the gallows for a crime he never committed, merely because a fickle woman had jilted him?

With this mental question and Red Kit's eloquent pleading on the same side, it is not to be wondered at that he finally held out his hands.

"The key!" he said, tersely. "I will go!"

The light of a great joy flashed over Red Kit's face, and the handcuffs were quickly removed.

"But," added Dick, "how are we to leave

here? How did you get here? Where are the guards? How—"

"Ask no questions now, for I will explain at a later time. Enough to say that I have removed all obstacles, and that the way is clear. Come, let us go!"

She took Dick's hand within her own, and led him from the jail. No one opposed their departure, and, as the hour was late, they saw only dark, deserted streets before them when the outer door was reached.

Red Kit, however, paused and looked about.

"Why do you delay?" Dick asked. "Every moment is of value—let us get away."

"I expected my ally here."

"Your ally! Who was that?"

"Jude Peterson."

"What! that accursed villain? Was he—"

Turpin was speaking hotly, but the mountain girl interrupted.

"Hush! hush, Dick! Wait until I explain. Ah! I see no one here, though he said he would wait. Well, I dare not delay, and if he will only keep out of sight wholly, I shall be only too glad. It will save us a good deal of trouble. If we can gain the mountains, all will be well. I have two horses waiting there, of which one is Brutus, and we will see if we can avoid them. Here are revolvers, Dick, and now let us go!"

They went!

Except for them all Leadville seemed asleep, and they glided rapidly through the streets like two specters of the night.

A great joy had fallen upon Red Kit. The future was shrouded from view, with its weal and woe, but she had rescued Dick and made partial amends for what she had done in the past. Dick might never care for her, but that other woman had forfeited her claim, and it was happiness to the mountain girl to be in the presence of the man she loved.

The city was soon left behind. Then, and not until then, did Red Kit explain how she had effected the rescue.

From the time when she failed to arouse Dick at the Legrand cottage, she had been considering how she could get him out of prison. She finally formed a plan, and went to Jude Peterson with the idea that all was fair in war.

She told the police spy that she knew where Dick had buried a good deal of the money obtained on the road, and that the secret, and the money, should be his, if he would help rescue the Leadville Lion.

Jude jumped at the offer. During the last few days he had wielded a good deal of power, outstripping the deputy-sheriff, and it was through this power that he had arranged successfully for Turpin's escape.

One thing, however, was mysterious.

He had remained at the jail entrance when Red Kit entered the cell, and was to be there when she came out, but, as we have seen, the promise was not kept. In this Turpin saw grounds for fear. He could not believe that Jude would willingly run the risk of losing his promised reward, and there was a mystery about the affair which was not favorable of aspect.

The Lion believed that fresh trouble was on foot.

It was a long journey to the cave where Red Kit had left the horses, and so much time had been lost in Leadville, the shadows of night began to disappear before the place was reached. This settled one point conclusively; it would not do to attempt flight at once. By that time the authorities probably knew of the escape, and, with them on the track, it would be reckless in the extreme to begin the flight by day.

In due time the cave was reached.

There Red Kit had concealed Brutus and her own horse, and stored food enough for them and two persons to last a week. There was no fear as to that.

Her first move at the cave was to prepare breakfast. No elaborate meal could be furnished, but it would be substantial.

While she worked Dick Turpin lay back at his ease, smoking the cigar she had given him. His mind had left the clouds and returned to real life, and he watched the girl as she flitted lightly about the place.

She had never looked prettier. Her face was flushed; the fire-light gave a deeper glow to her brick-red hair; and her clear-cut, intelligent face was at once bright and womanly. Trouble had prematurely brought to the surface the deep feeling which was a part of her nature, and though, if happy moments came in the future, the old, sparkling fountain of vivacity was sure to spring to the surface now and then, there was a sweet, gracious dignity about her manner which had not been visible when she was Red Kit, the Wasp.

Dick Turpin watched her with new emotions rising in his heart.

Of all those who had professed attachment to him, she, alone, had been unalterably faithful. Even her act which had so changed his destiny had been the result of her love for him, and now that he had discovered Lois's fickle, shallow nature, he was not sorry personally that it had been done.

Through all trouble, trial, desolation and discouragement, Red Kit's love had been a strong,

radiant, living star; when all others forsook him, she had been true.

If the girl was conscious of this scrutiny she gave no sign, and was calmly watchful of his interests as they ate their humble breakfast together. Her manner was modest; she spoke no more of her love; and a slight reserve was visible in her speech and actions.

When they had finished eating, Dick abruptly asked:

"When did you first suspect my deceit in the city?"

"When I went to take care of Bradstreet. I knew before I had been there ten minutes that it was not you. The sheriff resembled you wonderfully, as I often noticed when talking with you at the time I supposed you to be he, but I knew of this resemblance weeks before you took his place."

"You have been through a good deal of trouble in helping me, Kit?"

"I did it willingly," she replied, avoiding his gaze.

"What of the future? Suppose we escape? What are we to do then?"

"Go far from here."

"Ay, that follows, of course, but it was not that to which I referred. I was thinking of our future, taken exclusive of the rest of the world. Kit, I am peculiarly situated. A few days ago I was asserting my love for Lois Legrand in loud words. What if I should tell you now that my last spark of affection for her is gone?"

His gaze was fixed on Red Kit's face, and he saw a look flash to it which he could never forget. If ever face expressed deep, paramount joy it was hers, but she did not look up, her head drooped still lower.

Dick went on, without a pause:

"I suppose you, and every one else, would say that I, too, was fickle and inconstant, but, though the knowledge of her treachery stunned me at first, words cannot explain what utter loathing and disgust took possession of me later. The thought that I had wasted honest affection on one so inconstant was a bitter recollection, and it was disgust at my own folly, not sorrow at her conduct, which made me at first say, to-night, that I would remain and face my fate."

He paused, but Red Kit did not answer or stir.

He laid his hand upon hers and continued: "Kit, of all whom I once thought devoted to me, you alone have remained faithful; you alone have remained true to me in adversity, as in prosperity. Kit, if my feelings toward Lois have undergone a change, it is not greater than that in my feelings toward you. Once, you said that you loved me, but that affection could not have been deeper than that I now feel for you. Kit, I love you; shall we go through the journey of life together?"

Her large, handsome eyes were raised, and in them was all the light and wondrous tenderness of a true woman's love.

"Are you in earnest, Dick?" she whispered.

"I am!"

She said no more, but held out her hands, and then he clasped her in his arms, and she dropped her head on his shoulder with a tremulous sigh, which was the voice of her pent-up emotions.

Half an hour passed. It was a golden, happy period to Red Kit, and her face was radiant. At last!—at last her love was reciprocated, and all the doubts and dangers of their position could not prevent it from being the happiest period in her life.

All that half-hour they talked earnestly, and so far as they could control the future, their destinies were fixed. They would go to some place where they were wholly unknown, and there begin life anew, joined together until that time when death should part them.

Their happy conversation was rudely and strangely interrupted.

A step sounded not far away, and looking up they saw an intruder in the cave. More than that, Dick Turpin saw with amazement that the new-comer was a man he had hoped many miles away.

It was the Man with the Scar!

The ex-road-agent stared in speechless surprise, but the man of mystery broke into a mocking laugh.

"Didn't expect to see me, did you?" he sneered.

Turpin arose and faced him. The Lion's face had grown stern and implacable, but he was perfectly cool.

"No," he replied; "but, since it is so, I shall make no lamentation. Where are the Canadians?"

"I know not. I am not their keeper—nor are they mine. Did you think they could hold me? Bosh! no one can do that; you might as well try to chain the wind. I escaped, and have come back to see you, boy."

"It is well; I am not sorry; and now that you are here, we will have a settlement. I will force your secrets from you, or one of us dies before this affair is over."

"Nonsense! You talk wildly, as usual. Do you know that one part of this game has gone beyond my hands? But never mind that yet.

One speck of comfort I will give you. I have said that I could name the real criminal in that old murder case of which you were wrongfully accused. So I can. The real murderer has been found and hanged."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Turpin, in a deep voice.

"Another point I will explain. You wondered when you left the jail that you did not find Jude Peterson awaiting you. It was I who took him away; I was willing to give you a little rope."

"You have done well," the Leadville Lion coolly replied; "and now that you are in my hands, you can safely believe that you will not get away without a settlement."

His voice was stern and threatening, but the Man with the Scar smiled and seemed to be wholly at his ease.

"So you are still aggressive?"

"I am."

"Then you shall have the settlement without delay, though I fear it will hardly be to your liking."

The last word was quickly followed by a whistle, and then he suddenly stepped back. As he did so a revolver shot sounded from the entrance, and the Man with the Scar suddenly raised his hand to his breast, staggered and dropped to the ground.

A moment more and half a dozen men came pouring into the cave, and Dick Turpin saw that they were headed by the mayor of Leadville. He put up his hands with a revolver held in each, but the official made a quick gesture.

"Don't fire, Dick Turpin! It would only be a useless sacrifice of life, for we are far too strong for you. Besides, I am not sure that we need be such bitter enemies. Recent developments have placed your character at higher estimate; Sheriff Bradstreet is strong in your favor; and as one higher in authority than I will settle your case, I am willing to go light."

The Man with the Scar had been lying motionless, but he suddenly moved now. His hand strayed to his pocket, came out, and a glittering revolver was turned full upon Dick Turpin while murder gleamed in the man's eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SUN RISES ON A NEW LIFE.

FOR a moment the Leadville Lion was in great danger, but there was one man there who did not lose his presence of mind. This was Dick Turpin, himself; and he sprung forward and wrenched the revolver away before harm could be done.

"You'll excuse me," he observed, "but I decline to be butchered just now."

"Foiled!" hissed the Man with the Scar. "Where is the dog who shot me?"

"It was an accident," muttered one of the men. "I intended it for Turpin, but you moved just as I fired, and it hit you instead."

"What business had you to fire at any one?" sharply asked the mayor.

"I heard that Bradstreet said Turpin didn't kill Abe Knowlton, and I thought I'd take a hack at the outlaw."

Dick turned quickly to the mayor.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"About Knowlton?"

"Yes."

"It is. Sheriff Bradstreet states that he will swear that when his revolver dropped from his hand it was accidentally discharged, and that Knowlton then dropped suddenly. You need have no more fear on that score, while the sheriff has telegraphed the governor to pardon you."

"He has seen Sibylla, I reckon," thought Turpin.

He was carefully considering his situation. The mayor no longer acted like an enemy, and as the new-comers practically had the whole case in their own hands, he thought it might be best to go slow and not incur more enmity. Freed from suspicion in the Knowlton case, and with Bradstreet to help him otherwise, he might yet pass the breakers safely.

On the other hand, to resist these men would be to fail in the end, and to lay up fresh food for hatred against him.

Attention was now directed to the Man with the Scar, who had grown as pale as death. It was found that the bullet had entered his left breast, and even he knew that his time on earth was limited to a few minutes.

He motioned back those who would have tried to care for the wound.

"Let me alone!" he said curtly. "I am able to die without help. Stand back, all of you—I want to look at that man!"

His gaze was turned on Dick Turpin, who had just been whispering to Red Kit.

"Come here!" he said, abruptly. "You have often asked me my real name, and the time has come for revealing it. I am named Monk Gregerson."

"Ha! are you one of that family?" Dick exclaimed in surprise.

"Ay, that I am; more, I am the father of Jude Peterson, so-called, and his sister, Meg!"

Still more was Dick surprised. He had never heard mention made of the father of Jude and

Meg—though he did know they were brother and sister—but this avowed relationship was new to him, though the name was not.

"Yes," continued the Man with the Scar, or Gregerson, "such is the fact; and now to explain my hatred of your parents. My wife, the mother of Meg and Jude, was a quadroon belonging to your grandfather. You would not regard her as a lofty bride to whom to aspire, but I was a Gregerson, of Black Run, and your grandfather and your father ordered me never to dare come near the mansion again. Ordered me! Ay, and your father menaced me with the whip when I *did* come again.

"Even that had no effect. I was as obstinate and fierce as the Gregersons always were, and I saw the quadroon girl often in spite of opposition. We were married, too, after a form which may, or may not, have been legal; I don't know.

"Jude was our first child, but, thanks to the kind heart of your grandmother, who pitied the girl, affairs were managed so that nobody but herself was the wiser. I took the boy away and placed him with another branch of my family.

"When Meg was born, all went wrong. One evening I was at home—a bleak winter evening—when my wife tottered through the doorway, placed her baby, then but a few hours old, in my arms, and fell dying to the floor.

"She lived long enough to tell me that your father—your father, mind you, boy—had discovered all and driven her out into the night to perish. They said at the Hall—curse them!—that she had wandered away in delirium, but I knew whom to believe, and over my wife's grave I swore to avenge her.

"Notice how grandly fate worked in my behalf!

"A year later your father's first wife died, and he married again; but, lo! this time he had to marry secretly. Your mother, boy, was not of so grand a family as your father, and as his father was still alive, the son married secretly. This gave me opportunity for revenge, and I did not fail to seize the chance.

"One year more passed, and then you were born. Then I knew my time had come to strike. I did strike, and most gloriously. Your father I shot dead near his lordly mansion, and then I stole your mother's marriage-certificate, and all other proofs that she was the legal wife.

"Perhaps you know the result. When she went to your grandfather, with you, boy, in her arms, to ask for her rights, she was driven out as my wife had been driven out before. Hal ha!"

The dying man laughed in a husky, blood-chilling way, but Dick Turpin tersely, tensely said:

"Go on!"

"There is little more to tell, but I hounded the remaining years of your mother's life, never telling her who I was, but often showing myself and grinding her heart in ways I cannot repeat now—I am too weak, I think she had a suspicion that I killed her husband, but I don't know.

"Of course she could not prove her marriage, and she lived a miserable life until death came to her relief. Here was further revenge for me. You know, boy, how I have haunted your own life, doing what I could to ruin you, and I have only one thing more to tell to show how I have avenged my quadroon wife. What is the hour?"

The mayor looked at his watch.

"Ten minutes to nine."

"All's safe, then. Boy, I have told you through the late years that I still had the certificate of your mother's marriage—it was that which led you to join the road-agent band, in order to see me and get it. Well, that certificate I this morning gave to my son Peter, *alias* Jude Peterson, directing him, at just eight o'clock, to place it in the fire. Before this time it is in ashes, and you can never prove your mother's marriage!"

"Villain!" Dick Turpin exclaimed.

"Bah! you see from one side only. I do not forget my slave wife, who was driven out into the storm to perish. Ah! Ulo, I have avenged you well, and—"

These were the last words on his lips. Blood gushed from his mouth, and in a few moments more the Man with the Scar, otherwise Monk Gregerson, was dead.

The mayor had been an interested listener to this story, and he now turned toward Dick with a light in his eyes far from hostile. The two men held a somewhat lengthy conversation, and then Dick agreed to go back to Leadville. There was no charge against him now except his road exploits, and as the mayor promised to help compromise the matter, it was thought best to have it so, since the ex-road-agent could not escape by his own efforts.

Leadville was reached in due time, and Dick and the mayor went at once to Jude Peterson's room. If he had destroyed the marriage-certificate, some confession might be wrested from him.

What they saw when the door was opened surprised them.

Jude Peterson lay dead on the floor, his face to the bare boards, while one fast-stiffening

hand held outstretched toward a blazing fire a folded paper which was yellow with age.

Dick Turpin caught it, nervously looked at its contents, and then held it toward the mayor with a joyful face.

The lost certificate was recovered.

Physicians said that Jude had died of heart-disease, but it was a strange chance, akin to a direct act of Providence, which struck him down just as he was about to thrust the paper into the fire.

From there they went to the hospital, and Dick was not greatly surprised to see Robert Bradstreet being cared for by happy-faced Sibylla. The sheriff had improved wonderfully since the turn of his fever, less than a week before, and he looked bright-eyed and manly as he held out his hand to Turpin.

The latter accepted it with a suspicious quiver of his lips.

"Sir Lion of Leadville," the sheriff quickly said, "you and I have been enemies, but now that I know what you have done to protect Sibylla, my wife, I am your firm friend henceforth. There is much that I don't know, but perhaps you will explain a part when I've prevailed on the Governor to pardon you. There's nothing serious against you here. You did not kill Abe Knowlton, for the very good reason that my own accidentally-discharged revolver did the work. I've created a reaction in your favor here, and when I get up I'll see what more I can do."

"I thank you very much, but you said there were things you wished to know. What?"

"First of all, how does it happen that you look exactly like me?"

Dick Turpin hesitated, and then silently placed the recovered marriage-certificate in Bradstreet's hand. The latter glanced over it, and his face was filled with great surprise. When he had read to the end he looked up quickly.

"What's this?" he cried. "The marriage-certificate of Wayne Bradstreet and Luero Hendricks? Why, Wayne Bradstreet was my father!"

"And mine, too!" Dick Turpin answered. "I have known it for years, though I never had the proof until to-day. My real name is Richard Bradstreet, and I am your half-brother, which accounts for our resemblance. You are the son of our father's first marriage; I, of his second. This marriage was kept secret at first because my mother was a poor girl, and of a humble family; and when Wayne Bradstreet died, this very important paper was not to be found to prove her a legal wife."

"Say no more!" the sheriff interrupted. "After all this, the resemblance is enough to convince me. By my life! it sounds odd enough to call Dick Turpin, of Leadville, my brother, but the false pride of the Bradstreets has poor circulation in my veins. Brother, your hand!"

Their hands met, but Dick had too much to say to indulge in fraternal words then.

"But," he said, "why are you here when you have broad acres in Kentucky which are all your own?"

Robert's face clouded.

"I can't explain, at present," he replied.

"I can. You thought you had killed Monk Gregerson in a duel! Don't start, Rob, for it'll aggravate your illness. Well, you did not kill Monk. I have always known why you fled from Kentucky, and supposed that Monk was dead, but recent events show that, while I did not know him to be Monk, I have long known that particular Gregerson. You did not kill him, for he did not die until this morning."

"Then, I've exiled myself in vain," Robert exclaimed. "Monk Gregerson picked a quarrel with me; we fought; I thought I had killed him; I fled to Batesville, Arkansas, met and married Sibylla, under the name of Rob Edwards, and lived there until a Kentucky officer appeared."

"The chances are that he was not after me, but I thought he was and fled West. Then I read in a paper that my wife and children had been accidentally drowned in the White river. I was fool enough to believe it, and that accounts for our long separation. The clouds are clearing away now, and I hope all will soon be bright."

"Amen!" Dick Turpin fervently replied.

Nothing is more fickle than the opinion of the general public, and when, a fortnight later, it was known that Dick Turpin had been pardoned by the Governor, on condition that he would leave Colorado, those who had been the road-agent's bitterest enemies accepted the verdict philosophically.

Robbery was the only crime chargeable to him, and robbers were common in Colorado.

The Leadville Lion began to look forward to a happier future once more. Of his enemies, the Man with the Scar and Jude Peterson were dead; Sam Tobin was released by Old Man Hicks after terms had been made by which he was to leave the State, and much the same terms were made with the men locked in the cellar, at Sibylla's last refuge.

Meg was surrendered for trial in San Francisco for murdering her husband, but somehow obtained poison, swallowed it and died. Of course she had no claim on Sheriff Bradstreet.

Boy that he was in the old days when he wooed her at Black Run, he had finally learned her true character, and, instead of marrying her, had dropped her acquaintance.

For this she had tried to kill him at the time and afterward, with Jude, her brother, whom the sheriff had never seen, had tried to work the scheme which was foiled by Dick Turpin's knowledge of her California experience.

Neither she nor Jude had known anything about the Man with the Scar until he came to them at Leadville, and neither suspected that he was their father until the night before Jude's death.

All the Gregersons were unscrupulous and revengeful, and those who remembered Monk's quadroon wife all agreed that she was not turned out of doors at all, but went while mentally deranged. The Man with the Scar had small cause for his hatred, but only death extinguished it.

Robert Bradstreet made immediate preparation to return to the old home with Sibylla and the children. He fully recognized Dick Turpin as his brother, and would have taken him and Kit along, but neither would agree to it.

They were married in Leadville, their horses again summoned, and, accompanied by the ex-sheriff they rode away. A mile beyond the city they paused. Here Robert was to turn back.

"You must certainly let me hear from you often, Richard," the elder brother said.

"Rest assured, you shall, and I hope to so live that you will not be ashamed to keep up the correspondence. The old, dark life is past, and I hope to live an honest life henceforth. I shall have earnest help!"

He laid his broad hand on Red Kit's arm, and she smiled into his face with unbounded trust and love.

"It is for you to teach me," she replied.

"We will teach each other," Dick answered, "and the light of love shall show us both the road."

"May you both be happy!" Robert fervently said.

"I, for one, shall live as in paradise," Kit declared.

"And you will be the gracious queen," Dick added.

There they said good-by, and as the young couple rode away the sun fell full upon Turpin's manly form and happy face; and it turned Red Kit's hair a deeper hue, bringing into strong relief the unutterable happiness which was in her great, tender eyes and on her perfect face.

And so they rode into the West.

Six months later Robert Bradstreet, living in the old Kentucky home with Sibylla and the children, received a letter from which we make this extract:

"We have received definite news of Bowie Ben and the Legrands, and I need scarcely say that Ben and Lois are married. They are living in Washington Territory—whether happily or not, I don't know. It seems that they went to this remote place, dreading my anger! What folly! I feel not one particle of resentment; on the contrary, I bless the day they turned traitors. It brought the peace and happiness of my life.

"Robert, words cannot express how happy I am. No man ever had a better wife than Kit. She has recovered much of her old gayety, but retains the loving ways and thoughtfulness which trouble developed so suddenly in her character. We are both happy—perfectly happy."

"I am doing well here in business. Montana is a young country, but it is bound to grow, and I expect to be rich some day. Since I left Leadville no man can say I have done a dishonorable act. I understand that Duke Hallock and his wife are in Michigan."

"I am glad, Robert, to hear that all is well with you, and assure you I shall visit Kentucky some time, as you request. I have asked Kit if she has a message to send, and, after reading what I have written, she says: 'Tell them again we are both very, very happy!' And truer words were never spoken."

"Of course I am known here as Richard Bradstreet, but for this time, I will sign myself,

"DICK TURPIN, OF LEADVILLE."

So ended the letter, and so ends this record. Now that Dick rides Brutus peacefully over Montana hills, there is but a recollection in his life of the old, wild days when he was the Lion of Leadville.

THE END.

THE

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